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THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON:

A Black Country Story.

BY

JEANIE GWYNNE BETTANY.

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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Dedicated

TO MY VERY KIND FRIENDS,

MR. JOHN SAUNDERS

AND

MR. WALTER BESANT.

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THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

CHAPTER I.

JUBAL INSTRUCTS HIS UNCLE IN THE WAYS OF
SOCIETY.



IN the afternoon of a very dull Saturday in January, two years after Keziah Hackbit and Maud Towers were made widows, preparations were being made at The Chestnuts at Bowdon, for a party which Mr. David Rimmon was to give to some of his nephew's friends. Jubal, who now boasts of something more than down on his upper lip, and has grown broader and handsomer, stands with his back towards the drawing-room fire,

his hands thrust into his trouser pockets, and his head poised superciliously. David, anxious and nervous, watches his nephew's face as if to learn his content or discontent in it.

"Well, Jubal," he remarked, passing one hand through his hair, which was growing very scanty now, "does the room look like other people's now? Do you like it?"

"Well, really, uncle," replied Jubal, breaking into a light laugh, and showing a shining row of teeth, "as I chose all the things, it would be praising myself if I said I liked them."

David hooked both his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and looked quizzically at his nephew. "Yes, of course, Jubal," he said; "but is the furniture properly put in the room? You see I've no other room to compare it with."

"Oh, yes," Jubal allowed, "it looks well enough." He had got into the way of not expressing much pleasure at anything. "And uncle, if you don't mind my mentioning it, perhaps it may be as well that you should not put your thumbs in your waistcoat arm-holes before the fellows that are coming

here. Fellows are apt to take these things for indications, you know. And," he added, without noticing the manner in which poor David removed the thumbs in question, "don't you think really now you could manage to use h's, just a little? I shouldn't like to hear the fellows describe you as 'young Rimmon's uncle, innocent of h's.' I'm sure Medwin laughed when you asked him to come to your 'ouse; and after all, it's a simple enough matter to say 'house,' and so much hangs on it."

Poor David was completely in a flutter; and all the more likely to show badly before the "fellows" on that account. "You see, Jubal," he said, not at all crossly, "I never had much schooling; I went to work when I was ——"

"And there's another thing," said Jubal, flushing. "Pray don't refer to the time when you went to work."

There was almost impatience in the tone in which David replied to this. "It may be an easy matter to you, Jubal. But at my time of life it's no easy matter. I have managed to get on, and make a little money, without h's; though I am sure,

I didn't know that I talked any different to other people, before."

"That's what I thought," said Jubal, "and for that reason I draw your attention to it. Don't imagine that I wish to hurt your feelings."

But Jubal had hurt his uncle's feelings, and very deeply too ; and he, with his native gentlemanliness, which existed despite his lack of h's, did not turn upon his nephew with a rude rejoinder, as that young gentleman would certainly have done, could they have exchanged places. Neither did he wound Jubal's feelings by telling him of the wound he had inflicted, thereby proving himself the true gentleman ; for are not all the rules of society founded upon this basis, the avoidance of open wounding of the feelings of others ?

"I don't mind altering anything," said David, "if I am able to do it, and it's for your welfare."

"I thought you'd take it like that," returned Jubal. "You're an awfully good fellow."

If Jubal imagined that this salve would heal the wound he had inflicted, he was mistaken. He had robbed his uncle of confidence, and given him mis-

trust of himself in place of it. He had called his uncle a bear, and thought that patting him on the head, and saying, "Good fellow," as he might have done to a dog, would quite make up for it. He might have remembered that even a dog who has been well thrashed, rather resents than is grateful for the pats upon the sore places given him in token of reconciliation. But on the strength of David's saying nothing more than we have recorded, Jubal thought he would continue the lesson which had been so well received, having no penetration into the real state of his uncle's feelings; as those who do not love scarcely ever have.

"And you know, uncle," he went on, "gentlemen don't say 'Sir' to one another. In fact, there's little necessity for calling anyone anything. If you have occasion to use a name at all, you from your position might use the surname alone, as soon as you know them a little; otherwise you can say 'Mr. So-and-So,' but never 'Sir.'"

"Well, that is strange," said David. "I was brought up to think 'Sir' the right thing."

"Never mind what your bringing up was,"

returned Jubal. "I'll tell you the way to treat these fellows. You must pretend to look down on them instead of up to them."

"Is there any necessity at all for that?" said David. "Why should there be looking down or looking up?"

"That's just what it is," Jubal replied. "There's always looking down and looking up. And so you must look down on these fellows, or else they'll soon reckon you up. You mustn't remember anything except that you're a manufacturer and a rich man; and these fellows may be swells and all that, but I can tell you, between ourselves, they often don't know which way to turn for money; so you've no need to let them look down on you. And now, uncle, if you don't object, I'll put you into your suit, so that you may have time to get used to it a bit."

This suit was of a pattern such as David had never had on before. But, as Jubal had told his uncle, he dressed altogether out of his position.

"Yes, I'll put the suit on if you like, Jubal. I'm afraid it won't look very well on me. And you didn't tell me what these round tables are for, Jubal."

“Oh, never mind about that,” replied his nephew.

“Come and have your clothes on.”

As they passed out at the door, David looked back ruefully at his metamorphosed drawing-room. It was very pretty, with its rose-coloured curtains and furniture, pale carpet, and strange cabinets. But David's drawing-room was gone. He could never take a Sunday afternoon nap on *that* couch. It made him tremble even to think of it. In fact, he couldn't use the room for anything any more. Everything was gone that he wanted, and everything there was useless to him ; and there was a great deal of disappointment in his mind when he looked at the spot formerly occupied by an old-fashioned bureau which would open out, and on which he wrote his letters, and in the drawer of which he kept his camomile flowers, from which he made herb tea, as he called it. It was hard to see this spot occupied by a perfectly useless thing with glass in front, through which could be seen a number of very ugly curiosities. However, it had been inevitable, as the new suit proved to be.

“There, uncle, you'll look something like, now,”

said young Rimmon, standing at a little distance for the purpose of judging the effect of this new tailoring achievement.

"It doesn't feel very comfortable," David remarked ruefully. "It's too tight round the waist. I must undo this button."

"Oh, no; you mustn't do anything of the sort. That would spoil the effect entirely. You'll soon get used to it. And, you see, when that's buttoned you won't forget and put your thumbs in your waistcoat armholes, or your waistcoat pocket."

"It's very hot and uncomfortable up here," said David, feeling towards his chest. "It seems too thick somehow."

"If it's hot, all the better, this cold weather. They always put a bit of padding in there; it makes the coat sit well. You'll get to like it."

"But really I can assure you, Jubal," said his uncle, in some concern, "I can't wear these shoes. They hurt me. I'm sure they're two sizes too small."

"You didn't say so in the shop. Besides, it's all rubbish. If people have been used to wearing boots

on their feet, they're sure to fancy their feet are confined too closely in a pair of ordinary shoes."

"But why can't I put on the pair of slippers that Kizzy worked for me?" pleaded David.

"Oh, if you're going to get obstinate," said Jubal, pretending to get vexed.

"I'll try to get used to them," said David. "Perhaps, if I walk about in them, they'll get easier." And he made the attempt.

"Oh-h-h," cried Jubal, aghast. "You mustn't limp about like that. The fellows'll roar."

"Perhaps they'll get easier just now," said poor David, "or else I shall really be obliged to take them off."

"Oh, bless you, you'll get used to it, uncle. Everybody's boots hurt them, only they pretend they don't. I'm sure mine do; and, you see, you've always the advantage of being able to put on some big shoes when nobody's here."

David was silent. He was ruminating. If society made such demands as these, it must surely have some big return to give. David could not

exactly see any return, but then that was his ignorance.

Taking advantage of the silence, Jubal went on talking.

“I’m glad that the waiter has arrived in good time. I shall go in and give him some directions. And mind you don’t treat him as if he’s a stranger, and had in for the evening. You must order him about well, you know. And you mustn’t say ‘please’ to him, nor ‘thank you;’ people never do that in society.”

Poor David felt himself in a labyrinth of new formalities and ideas. He knew his troubles were not over. Children are to be pitied sometimes when, under merciless teachers, they tread their first steps towards learning; but how much more the old pupil who takes his first lessons at the tyrannical and merciless school of society.





CHAPTER II.

JUBAL'S FRIENDS.



SEIGHT o'clock approached, the bell rang, and David trembled. He had been told by Jubal that he must receive the guests, and he inwardly wished that the earth would receive him. But the earth is not kindly in this respect; and though for indefinite centuries she has been frequently called upon to perform this office, she has but rarely been known to accede to the demand, and in these few cases the result has probably not produced all the satisfaction desired.

The waiter announced the Honourable Pelham Winterfold and Mr. Allan Denleigh. David nervously shook hands, and slunk into the background,

while the new arrivals exchanged greetings of a freer kind with the nephew, whom they called "Rimmon." They appeared to have dined, and were in strikingly high spirits.

"Snug little place you have here," remarked Winterfold, addressing David, who started violently, and muttered something inaudible.

"Yes, quite so," assented Mr. Denleigh, throwing himself unceremoniously upon one of the new satin chairs, and shaking out a highly-scented handkerchief before applying it to the prominent feature of his face.

"Are we to play high or low to-night?" inquired Winterfold, backing towards the fire, and remaining stationary in front of it.

"As far as I am concerned," said Mr. Denleigh, in a high treble, "half-crowns are all the pieces I am worth. Played out, you know, last night. Awful bad luck. We were all at Springwood's. Deuced hot time of it. Springwood *père* won everything."

"He's a trifle *too* sharp," replied Winterfold. "But, you see, one must be willing to pay a little

for one's pleasures ; and his daughters are deucedly fine girls."

"Winterfold's going to induce the youngest to marry him and leave the stage," said Denleigh, winking at Jubal. "She'd make a charming 'my lady,' some day."

"Thanks," said Winterfold, without moving any feature except his upper lip, which curled slightly. "Marrying's not in my line. Besides, I don't consider that Miss Juliet or her sisters would be much good in electioneering, and everything depends on a man's wife if he has a Parliamentary career before him ; doesn't it, Mr. Rimmon ?" he said, appealing to David.

David was so much aghast at what he had heard, that he could not stammer out a word of reply. He had not understood the conversation in the least ; but he was under the impression that all was not right. So he pretended not to hear when Winterfold addressed him, and examined a picture on the wall, as if he had never seen it before.

"You'd do a lot in Parliament," remarked Jubal ; "you need to have a wife who would do something.

And I don't think Miss Juliet can do anything, unless it's dancing; she can't act at all: and as for singing — well, I can't think what Springwood's dreaming about, to put in so many songs for her."

"Well, you see," Winterfold rejoined, "the British theatre-goer has not a very good ear for music, and she always gets applauded. But whatever be her merits, she's not for me, even if I wished it. She's already the secret property of a certain judge who often dines at my father's table, and preaches morality to my young brothers and sisters."

Another ring at the bell. "Mr. Sheridan Springwood and Mr. Richmond Scratch" were announced. Another ordeal for David ensued. He went through it better this time, however, as he thought. In shaking hands with Mr. Springwood, he remarked with cordiality, "Why, I knew someone of your name, Mr. Springwood; I wonder if it was a relation of yours."

"Very likely, indeed," replied that gentleman, cheerfully. "I've a great many about." At which there was a loud laugh, for which David saw no

reason. "Where did the people live that you knew?" went on Mr. Springwood, with the utmost good humour, while Mr. Scratch kept as close to him as he conveniently could, his head perched on one side, taking it all in.

"In Staffordshire," said David, "the Springwoods lived I knew. They were butty colliers, and worked in the Troworth Hill mines."

"In that case," broke in Denleigh, "I can answer for it they were no relatives of this Springwood, who is most highly connected in every way, I can assure you;" upon which there was another loud laugh, in which everybody joined except Springwood, who appeared rather annoyed, and curtly disclaimed the relationship.

"Don't look black, Springwood," said Winterfold, aggravatingly, "or else you'll have Scratch writing a paragraph about you, in which he will say that the admirable manner in which this gentleman personifies Othello can only be accounted for by those who have the privilege of knowing him in private."

"If I couldn't write any better than that," said

Mr. Scratch, indignantly, "I shouldn't have been so successful as I have been."

"Ah, to be sure," chimed in Denleigh, "you write paragraphs for the *Police News* now, don't you?"

"If I did," replied Scratch, hotly, "it might be possible that you would figure in one of them."

"Oh, oh," broke from the rest of them.

Mr. Sheridan Springwood had received a deeper wound than appeared on the surface; for he had never yet played Othello, though he was most ambitious to do so, and had a dreamy notion that he might have made this desire of his public after taking a little too much brandy. He looked upon himself as a spirit in chains, for he was at present playing Blue Beard in his father's theatre, where nothing beyond low burlesque was ever attempted. David felt sorry for him, though he did not in the least comprehend the situation.

"Are you fond of acting, sir?" asked Mr. Rimmon, forgetting his part.

"I am obliged to be, whether I am or not," replied the actor. "It is my profession."

“Oh, indeed!” said Mr. Rimmon, looking at him with a new interest. “I was not aware of that.” And he stared at him, thinking within himself that an actor looked uncommonly like an ordinary man.

“I don’t know what we’ve got to amuse you, gentlemen,” went on David. “We might get up a charade, as you are fond of acting.” A great roar of laughter followed this bold suggestion, in which all joined except Jubal, who looked very angry, and remarked that they were not infants in arms, any of them, and that they would have a rubber of whist, as soon as the other fellows should arrive. They did arrive before he had done speaking; and were announced: “Mr. Rufus Harris, Mr. Hanson, and Mr. Medwin.”

After a hurried touch of hands, the gentlemen placed themselves round two of the tables, and David saw now what they were for. Packs of cards began to be shuffled. At the table nearest to David, Winterfold, Denleigh, Springwood, and Scratch were seated; at the other, the rest of the party.

The waiter here came in with glasses and bottles,

much to David's astonishment ; and feeling himself quite like a fish out of water, he made his escape through the open door, that he might be able to breathe a little. Returning to the room in the course of half-an-hour, he found it in a state of uproar. A sharp altercation was going on between Winterfold and the comedian, in which a glass had been knocked off the table and smashed ; at which Mr. Scratch abstractedly aimed an empty bottle. David could hardly believe his eyes. He was still more startled when he observed Mr. Denleigh gathering up half-crowns, and pocketing them with a delighted smile.

“ They must be gambling,” thought David. But Jubal assured him this was not the case ; that each man would be given back all his own half-crowns at the end, when the party broke up ; which statement was received with a burst of applause by the company, and which poor David took in.

David didn't smoke, and the drawing-room was getting really stifling, by means of the fumes of eight cigars, and he was literally compelled to absent himself. This he did rather unwillingly ; for he

was in fact anything but easy at the course things seemed to be taking. Not knowing what else to do with himself, he went into his dining-room, where an elaborate supper was laid ; and he dreaded the moment when he should have to sit at the head of it.

The noise in the drawing-room increased. He heard a crash, which he afterwards discovered to be caused by the fall of some of the glass pendants from the chandeliers, at which Mr. Scratch had aimed another bottle. Random throwing was always a feature in his form of drunkenness. David thought he would quite as soon enter a lion's den, as go back into the drawing-room. He waited for them to break loose upon him in the dining-room, when they should choose to have supper, which they did soon after twelve.

The drawing-room door was flung open, and the party came out quite steadily, to David's great surprise ; they did not appear to be very drunk. Jubal placed Winterfold at David's right hand. The rest took their seats as they liked, and with an air of being perfectly at home.

"No journal'll get any paragraph from you, Scratch," remarked Hanson, who was sitting next to him. "You've not been looking out for anything, you know."

"Oh, indeed," replied Mr. Scratch, trying to fix his eye upon the speaker, but failing in the attempt; for that organ would wander all about the room indefinitely, and his mouth was stretched into a strange smile, though he was in anything but a good humour.

"It's a mystery how he lives at all," said Medwin, who was upon the other side of Hanson. "He's always sending in wrong information."

"That's quite true," admitted Mr. Scratch. "You see, when there's no information, what's one to do?"

David heard this, and asked in some anxiety, "Am I to understand, Mr. Scratch, that you invent things to send as news to the papers?"

"Well, you see, I must live," was the reply.

David forgot to go on carving for a moment. He was thinking within himself that this accounted for statements in the papers getting contradicted the next day. At last David went on with his work,

and with a valiant effort entered into conversation with Winterfold, who was helping himself to wine rather freely, as indeed most of the company seemed to be doing, without ceremony.

"My nephew tells me you are at Cambridge," he began (he nearly said "sir").

"Well," replied Winterfold, with an approach to a grin, "I was there."

"Ah," said David, "it's the vacation now, isn't it? When will you be returning?"

This question was greeted with laughter, especially by Denleigh, who explained to David that Winterfold was "down" for a year.

"Down?" said David, interrogatively.

"That is, he's not to go back to Cambridge for a year."

"Oh," said David, "I understand you. Your health gave way, I suppose, sir?"

"Well, no," replied Winterfold, who certainly did look in pretty good health. "I was sent down. Had a difference with the tutor, you know."

"Yes," chimed in Denleigh; "and it was an awful shame, for he would have been sure to have

come out Senior Wrangler, if he had stayed up."

David, out of politeness, felt obliged to continue the conversation. "It must be very pleasant at Cambridge. I passed through it once, on my way to Ely, and I thought it looked very solemn."

"You've never seen a degree day, have you, Mr. Rimmon?" broke in Denleigh, tossing off a glass of wine as he spoke.

David confessed that he had not.

"Very solemn," said Winterfold, "very. I got sent down because I smiled at one. You're not allowed to smile in the Senate House. And yet it's difficult not to do so when you're so full of pleasure at the sight of so much greatness. The Public Orator makes a speech in Latin."

"Rather difficult to follow, isn't it?" asked Mr. Rimmon.

"Oh, no, not at all," asserted Winterfold. "We're examined in it after."

"I don't quite understand," said David.

"This is it," put in Denleigh, winking at Winterfold. "They think it well in the universities to

train spontaneous memory, and one of the means is to reproduce the Public Orator's speech."

"And when have you to do this? Soon afterwards?" asked David.

"The following Sunday," answered Winterfold. "Just before the sermon at the 'Varsity Church."

"I didn't know they had anything of that sort in churches," David remarked, considerably astonished. "But I should like to know how they give the degrees."

"Well, the Vice-Chancellor, you know, he sits at one end."

"Does he sit waiting for them to come in?" inquired David, trying to get details.

"Oh, no. He has to march three times round the town first, in gorgeous robes, preceded by two big fellows with silver pokers, and masks on; and then they walk all the way up the Senate House, when it's full, to have better effect; after which the Vice-Chancellor sits down, as I told you."

"Is anybody allowed to go in?" asked David.

"Oh, yes. And it gets pretty full, I can tell you."

"I suppose you cheer your friends when they take their degree," David observed.

Winterfold shook his head. "Oh, no, we're not allowed to speak in the Senate House."

"It's very strange," returned David, "but I've somewhere got hold of another impression about that."

"Misinformed," said Denleigh, "misinformed."

"The best lark is when there are some honorary degrees," continued Winterfold. "Those fellows who are going to have a degree given them, always look twice as grand as anybody else. They quite patronise the Vice-Chancellor, and look up with a lofty scorn at the galleries, where we undergraduates are packed like so many herrings. No doubt they would like us to applaud, but, you see, we're not allowed. Only wish they'd got the Little-go to go in for," went on the speaker, with considerable warmth; "they'd find it out, and perhaps they wouldn't be up taking their degree quite so soon. A lot of 'em came and dined at our college, at the high table, where I used to dine, being a fellow-commoner, you know."

"What do they talk about, now?" said David, addressing the fellow-commoner.

"Awful rot," replied Winterfold. "They did nothing but pay each other compliments. I know one was trying not to get out of temper with another—something about the weight of the world. One said it weighed a quarter of an ounce more than the other; and that's how it was, I think."

"I say, Fuss," said Denleigh to Rufus Harris, who was usually so nicknamed by his friends, "do you remember when Professor Stargazer had his degree?"

"I remember what followed it, if I don't remember that," answered Harris.

"What was it?" inquired Scratch, anticipating a paragraph.

"You'd better ask Winterfold; he knows most about it."

"He wasn't my friend, at any rate. It was my father he knew," broke out Winterfold, indignantly. "I don't know what he called at my rooms for. I didn't want to see him, I'm sure."

"Then why did you offer to take him to see the boats?"

"I didn't. It was he who asked me to go with him."

"Well, you needn't have led him through such frightful mire," went on Harris. "Besides, it didn't look dignified to see him running by the side of the river, as you made him. And it was too bad to get him in such a mess."

"I suppose he knew what the river banks were likely to be when he asked," returned Winterfold.

"He didn't, I'll swear."

"Well, he wasn't disgusted with me, at any rate, for he came in to breakfast with me next morning, and a deuced lot it cost. However, I hadn't to pay for it; it went down in the bill."

"Do you have breakfast in your own rooms, then?" asked David, breaking in once more.

"Oh, yes," replied Winterfold, "if a pint of coffee and a roll and butter can be called breakfast."

"Really now, are you not allowed to choose what you like?"

"Oh, no, not at all. Plainest possible diet, regulated strictly. Harris had the time of it; he lodged out, up in Lily Crescent; and he passed the evenings

throwing toast into the opposite windows, where another fellow lodged. There are shops underneath, and the toast fell on the people who went into them sometimes, and lumps of sugar too."

"Who was it started the toast-throwing," put in Denleigh, "I should like to know? Both of you were in my rooms at the time, at any rate."

"Yes: and I recollect," observed Denleigh, "that you locked us in the room till after twelve, and got us gated."

"Really," said David, "I had no idea that gentlemen went to universities to amuse themselves—really I hadn't."

The three undergraduates laughed on hearing this. "Look here, Mr. Rimmon," said Harris, with great solemnity: "I saved both these men from ruin once. The proctor had got wind of us, and the slavey let him into the house. You've no idea what awful slaveys those lodging-house ones are. There ought to be a university regulation to make them wash themselves; you'd say so if you could see one. Well, when I heard the proctor coming upstairs——"

“What is a proctor?” asked David.

“Oh, a kind of university policeman,” replied Harris. “I just locked the door, and let those two swarm down a rope I’ve got, into the street, and there they were, you know; and I made out there was something the matter with the lock, until they had got clean off, down the rope at any rate. When the proctor came in, he saw only me and my reading-lamp and my books. He was quite amazed when I asked him if anything were the matter—quite politely, you may be sure. He said he certainly thought he had heard an uproar coming from this very window. I suggested the rooms opposite as the seat of the disturbance, and complained of the difficulty of working while there was such a row.”

“That was a very narrow escape,” said David. “I hope it was a lesson to you all.”

“Oh,” remarked Springwood, derisively. “I don’t call that anything of a situation.”

“You try it, that’s all,” said Denleigh, hotly.

“He’ll try a rope in another position,” suggested Scratch, who was getting rather far gone, and hiccupped considerably.

"I'm not going to give you the pleasure of writing that paragraph," retorted Springwood. "You had better learn to make use of those you have. Oh," he said, turning to Hanson, "I wish I had half that fellow's chances. He's always losing them. Only the other day he was sent specially to report on the health of a certain member of Parliament who had been lying at the point of death, and while he was waiting for latest details, he hanged if he didn't go and get drunk; and when the details were given him, he couldn't understand a word of it, and there was nothing in the paper next morning about it."

"But there was a jolly row," Scratch allowed.

"I wonder they had any more to do with you on the paper," observed Medwin, who said very little, but generally managed to make that little offensive.

"They knew whom to value," said Scratch, laboriously. "It's more than you seem to."

"I tell you another thing Scratch did," remarked Hanson. "Young Rimmon doesn't know it, I think. He went to a great temperance meeting, where Lord Winterfold was presiding."

“Ah,” said Winterfold, appreciatively, “my dad’s awful on the teetotal question.”

“You haven’t imbibed much of his spirit, at any rate,” put in Jubal, laughing.

“I prefer to imbibe spirit of another sort,” replied Winterfold. This was pretty evident from his action at this moment.

The gentleman about whom the story was to be told began a devil’s tattoo on the table with two glasses, to drown the voice of the narrator.

Mr. Hanson only raised his voice, and was perfectly audible ; while Medwin, who was his supporter in all things, took the glasses from Scratch’s hands, and flung them quietly under the table, for which he was applauded.

“I say Scratch went to this meeting, where Lord Winterfold was presiding ; sent on purpose to report his speech ; and he hanged if he didn’t go drunk to the meeting and fall asleep in the middle of it ; and just half of the speech was reported in the paper next day, and the compositor had to make something up to round it off a bit.”

"It wasn't the compositor," exclaimed the indignant Scratch, "who rounded it off."

"That's quite immaterial to the story," said Medwin. "Somebody had to round it off, at any rate, whether it was the compositor or the devil."

"And yet he wasn't turned off the paper," said Hanson. "Here you behold him, flourishing like a green bay tree. You wouldn't take him to be a poet, now, to look at him," went on his tormentor.

The whole company agreed that they certainly should not.

"Well, it's all through a poem he wrote, that got published in the *Kangaroo*, that he got his position. He was only a penny-a-liner before then: and now he can take what he likes."

Scratch suggested that he should like to take some cherry brandy, and forthwith he helped himself, after which, he turned very affectionately to Springwood, and announced his intention of dying if Juliet did not return his affection. "She cares no more for me," said the journalist, "than if I were nobody," which was probably the truth.

David began to be alarmed at the prospect of

some private revelation. None followed, however. But Scratch fervently promised Springwood that he would write the best notice imaginable, about the new burlesque then coming on.

“Look here, old fellow,” he said, “you shall write down what you want me to say, and I’ll put it into form.”

So Springwood and Scratch shook hands, and Scratch invited himself to lunch at Springwood’s the following Monday, where he would catch a glimpse of Miss Juliet before she went to rehearsal.

Here, without any prelude, Mr. Denleigh announced in song his intention of not going home till morning. All the company, except David, joined him in this, and a great noise ensued.

It was about three o’clock in the morning, when a flood of light shot across the path from The Chestnuts, and seven rollicking figures turned out, still insisting that they were not going home till morning. Most of them had not far to go, fortunately. But Springwood and Scratch had to get into the heart of Manchester, somehow. As a matter of fact, they didn’t get home at all that night, owing to Mr.

Scratch's sitting down on a stone in the high road, and refusing to stir, declaring in sepulchral tones, that this was the headstone of the grave of his fallen genius.

As for Jubal, he was stretched at full length under the dining-room table, until his uncle and the waiter carried him upstairs: the former, wretched and dazed, not in the least knowing what action to take, and repenting as bitterly that he had adopted Jubal.





CHAPTER III.

THE DENLEIGHS.



ABOUT two miles outside Bowdon was a dreary stretch of land, productive chiefly of thistles. A widish brook intersected this piece of waste, and pollard willows of gaunt and weird proportions flourished on its banks. No other trees were to be seen, with the exception of three solitary straight poplars that stood sentinel over a bed of osiers. The land was put to no sort of use, and had a man-and-God-forsaken aspect, rarely to be met with, but not easily to be forgotten. No cows grazed there, no cottagers made use of the deserted place to turn pigs or ducks out, no birds ever seemed to be singing in its immediate neighbourhood; not even a

donkey browsed there, though his favourite herb was most abundant. A narrow footpath lay right across it by the side of the brook, and finally crossed the brook by a little bridge, with a rail on one side only. The path was not much worn, as there was a more direct road than across these fields to almost anywhere it could lead to. At one season of the year it nearly always became flooded.

The people who owned this land lived in an old-fashioned great house, situate in a valley about half a mile distant from it. The reader might conclude either that there was no master to this establishment, or that he was abroad. Neither was the case. Colonel Denleigh scarcely ever left the house, which everyone else in it devoutly wished he could leave. They led but a dreary life, except when the Colonel's nephew and a chance friend came home from Cambridge. Mrs. Denleigh, a tall lady with much to boast of in the way of ancestors, and an indescribable air of never for a moment forgetting that she used to be young and good-looking, invited such society as could be got together, considering that her husband was a confirmed invalid, and a thought too likely to

quarrel, and that she was encumbered with a rather plain daughter, who, if she did not know that she was plain, had the lesson pretty well drummed into her in her daily contact with her worthy parents. It will be imagined that Winterfold's advent was a perfect godsend. "For who knows," said Mrs. Denleigh to her husband, when he was in a rather better temper than usual, which was not saying much, "but what he may marry Amelia off our hands? I do think there's nothing so disagreeable and irritating as to see a girl metamorphosed into an old maid under one's very eyes."

"None of the other fellows that have come here have married her," retorted her husband, snappishly. "Everybody isn't such a born fool as I was."

Mrs. Denleigh was so accustomed to this kind of remark that she went on without noticing it. "It's of no use to take Amelia to dinner parties and to balls. She doesn't show there. She shines in a domestic light. Therefore, if we wish to marry her, we must bring young men to stay in the house and see what she is."

"If she shines in a domestic light," said the irritable father, "it's more than her mother does."

This conversation, with slight variations, took place at least once or twice in every vacation, when Allan proposed to bring a friend home.

On the Sunday morning following the party at The Chestnuts, the colonel, with the aid of the butler and one or two more servants, had been landed in the breakfast parlour, and was angrily looking out on a dreary stretch of lawn, and a partially frozen fishpond at the bottom of it. There was no newspaper, and this always vexed him. It was the one drawback to Sunday in his opinion. For this reason it was but peevishly that he replied to the greeting of Winterfold, who entered the room as faded-looking as any painted beauty appears at her breakfast-table after a night's revel.

"Morning," grunted the colonel.

"Think we shall have any skating?" asked Winterfold, rubbing his bloodshot eyes with a silk handkerchief.

"How can I tell?" replied the colonel. "The

weather's nothing to do with me. I wish they'd bring that breakfast in. Where's Allan?"

"Here, uncle," said that gentleman, entering the room as washed-out as his companion. "Do you want me for anything?"

"Where's Amelia?"

"Hang it all, uncle, what's up with you this morning?"

The colonel made no reply, but continued to scowl through the window.

When Amelia came in, had nodded to her cousin and his companion, and kissed the colonel's forehead, she seated herself at the table to dispense the breakfast, which had been brought in on her entrance. Perhaps she was a trifle plain, but she looked very pleasant, which was a credit to her in such a place.

"Are you going to help me up to the table or not?" said the colonel to his nephew.

"Why, certainly, sir," replied that individual. "But you might ask in a different manner." And Winterfold on one side, and Denleigh on the other, escorted the bristling colonel to his accustomed seat.

Conversation was not readily made, as the two younger gentlemen had headaches ; the elder gentleman, a general ache all over, produced by combined rheumatism and gout, which, in fact, had crippled him. As for Amelia, she never talked much—perhaps because her elders had set her the example of talking a great deal more than they should have done. She did, however, ask if her cousin and Mr. Winterfold were going to church with her.

“ We may as well go,” said Denleigh, to his companion rather than in answer to his cousin. “ We may see those girls.”

“ What girls ? ” inquired the colonel.

“ Well, to tell you the truth, we don’t know,” replied Allan ; “ but we know where they live, and I wish aunt would call on their folks.”

“ What are they like ? ” the colonel proceeded to ask, with a show of interest.

“ Rather difficult to describe,” said his nephew. “ They are both tall. But I think the dark one’s the prettiest. She’s more piquant, at any rate.”

The colonel, who was always desirous to add to his acquaintance any good-looking women, mentally

resolved that his wife should call upon them, whoever they were, and invite them to his next dinner, if they could be got to come. But he remarked aloud, not being able to express this to his wife at the moment, that he did wish Mrs. Denleigh would leave off that habit of having breakfast in bed, and come down, as any other lady would.

Before breakfast was finished, Mrs. Denleigh did arrive, but dressed for church.

“Look here, aunt,” began Allan at once, “I’ll show you those young ladies I spoke of to-day. They are sure to be at church, and uncle wants you to call on them.”

“Which I shall not do until I can find out who they are,” said the proud lady, with a haughty and disdainful look at her husband. “If army gentlemen are content to make indiscriminate acquaintances, they can scarcely expect their wives to follow suit.”

That morning after church Denleigh managed to get the rector’s wife to introduce the ladies in question to his aunt. After a few commonplace remarks, the ladies passed on, and Mrs. Denleigh asked the rector’s wife who they were.

“ They are two widows who live together,” was the reply. “ Very quiet, and keep a great deal to themselves, I have heard. My husband has been insisting that I should get them out.”

“ But do you mean to tell me,” said Mrs. Denleigh, “ that that one with the short black curls is a widow ? She doesn’t look out of her teens.”

“ She is a widow, and has a little boy. I have seen him out with his nurse. But she is very cross-grained, and will hardly let you look at the child.”

A few minutes later, as they were walking along the road bordering on the waste land we have spoken of, Winterfold descried two black figures moving leisurely along at the side of the brook. He indicated the fact to his friend ; and when once the ladies of their own party had turned round the corner which led into their own grounds, Winterfold and Denleigh made a simultaneous rush towards the little bridge that led across the brook into the waste land, and then walked leisurely enough towards the two black advancing figures.

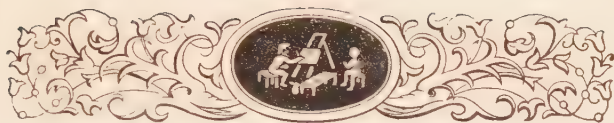
“ We must take off our hats, because, you see, we have been introduced,” said Winterfold. “ We’ve

no need to wait for them." They were quite close to the ladies now, and off went the hats. The two girls bowed slightly and gravely, and passed on, talking together.

The young men were now uncertain what to do. "We may as well go on to the high road," said Denleigh. "They are bound to come back this way, unless they go by the high road; for that way leads nowhere except to our place. Hang it, who's that fellow?"

Someone was coming from the high road on to the waste land. "He's either going to our house or else following them. Deuced cheek, whichever it is." And as the stranger passed by them, they greeted him with a haughty stare, which he returned with one equally haughty.





CHAPTER IV.

A DAY OF MISTAKES.



HE gentleman, who overtook Keziah and Maud, began in a measured voice of suppressed agitation—

“Kizzy, I have done as you told me. I have not come near you till the time is up. It has been very hard; but I have obeyed you.”

Keziah crimsoned and trembled, but did not speak. She looked piteously at her companion. Then turning to Elworthy, she said, wearily—

“Why did you come to me? I am not worth the trouble. I have been frozen up and no thaw has come. I have no right to any happiness yet.”

“Ah,” said Maud, “how are you to thaw, if you

will never let the sun shine on you? I tell you, Kizzy, it is time to have done with this sort of thing. The way you have kept Dr. Elworthy at a distance these two years, is, in my opinion, as grave a mistake as the other one. There is no kind of sense in it. Of course you must come home and have lunch with us, Dr. Elworthy."

"You are very good, Mrs. Towers," replied the doctor. "I will come." And without any hesitation, he placed Keziah's little black-gloved hand on his arm; and they walked quietly on.

Maud took Keziah's bonnet upstairs for her, bidding her stay where she was with the doctor. Left thus in the dining-room, these two fell into an embarrassed state scarcely to be imagined. It was Keziah who spoke first.

"What a strange thing it is, Rupert, to be past enjoyment," she began.

"Yes, the state must be a strange one," returned Rupert, sadly. "But such as you and I can only conjecture about it."

Keziah shook her head. "No," she said. "I feel very, very old, and think more about the time when

I shall be laid in my grave, than of any new life such as opens to many girls of my age."

"You think in that way, because you have never let me come to see you."

"Shall I tell you the truth?"

"If you know it."

"I wish you had not come now."

He looked at her reproachfully.

"I had begun to grow calm," went on the girl, "to become a little reconciled. Why need you awaken the struggle again?"

"Kizzy," he said, painfully, "I don't think I understand you rightly. It sounds as if after all I have given up for your sake, and after all I have suffered—it sounds—oh, heavens, I can hardly think of it. It sounds as if you meant to give me up."

"Oh," returned Keziah, bitterly, "I am not like other girls. You have thought me free; but I have not been free. I have a sin to expiate. Why couldn't you have let me alone? It would have been kinder; kinder and better in every way. There is only this one thing left that I can do," she went on. "Perhaps I can atone a little in this way.

Had I been a better wife, and never met you at all—for that was very wrong, I see it all now—my husband might never have drunk himself to death.”

“Kizzy,” began Elworthy, his tender look giving place to one of sternness and some indignation, “can you still maintain a desperate allegiance to a departed man who never truly loved you, and whom you never could have loved? It can do him no good, and you nothing but harm. Were I like other men, I might have told you that you broke faith with me first. But I have been patient, too patient. In your letter you only asked for time. I yielded to you, as I have in everything. But you can never have cared for me really; not as I have cared for you, or I am sure you could not have kept me at a distance so long, when you were free.” This he said, hoping to call forth from her some declaration of love.

She held her head averted. “I cannot be as if none of these things had ever been,” she said. “If I married you, could I be happy? I should always be reverting to the past. I should make you miserable; and I should be miserable myself. I think I

am played out. I am fit for nothing but the kind of life I am leading now. I think," she added, with a wistful smile, "if I were a Catholic, I should go into a convent."

"Well, Keziah," said her old lover, with gravity, and nothing more, in his tone, and with his eyes looking quite away from her, "it seems to me that there is only one person you have utterly lost sight of, and treated ungenerously in all this; and that is myself. Love can live through scorn, and separation, and almost everything except cold apathy. Keziah, ask yourself, would it make no difference to you if I were to tell you that my love was played out?"

She started, and fixed her great eyes on him, if possible to read more in his face than his words had implied.

"Rupert," she said, "I have prayed that that should happen"—he winced—"but that is because my love for you can never change, and has never changed." Here, by a mighty effort, she controlled herself so as to show no emotion, but only fixedness of purpose.

"Then all I can say is," he replied, almost

roughly, "your love is the strangest and most eccentric I have ever met with."

"Why should I give you the dregs of a life," went on Keziah, "and bind you to a woman who can do nothing but fret, and make your life a burden to you? And," she said, with hot cheeks, "do you know what the people said? Yes, you do know: they said we went away together. They said the worst things of us."

"They know now it was quite untrue," was his reply.

"But they would believe all was true that they suspected, if I married you now," she rejoined bitterly.

"Oh," said Elworthy, with a laugh that sounded forced and hard, "so it is the world's opinion you are thinking of, and not any feeling of mine. That being the case, I need trouble you no further. It cannot matter to you that I have wasted the best years of my life in a fruitless love. You care more about the world's opinion than anything I may suffer, and would punish the living to serve the dead even now. Well, Keziah, I am not sure you are not

played out. I am compelled to suspect that your very womanhood is frozen up. Good-bye, Keziah. I will try to follow your example. It seems an easier process than I should have imagined."

Keziah could not speak. She could make no effort to rise as he left the room. In a moment she heard him leave the house.

Maud came down in a hurry now ; though she had been an unusually long time in taking off her bonnet and putting Keziah's away.

"What is the meaning of this, Kizzy?" demanded Maud, flinging into the room, and looking at the white-faced girl almost angrily. "What have you done?"

Keziah began to cry and sob. Pitiable though she looked, Maud would neither pity nor comfort her. "I am sure you have done something foolish, or he would never have gone off like that. And I tell you what it is, Keziah, there is such a thing as wearing a man's patience out, though you don't seem to think it. I don't suppose he'll come back again. He'll believe you don't care anything about him."

"That's what he says," sobbed out Keziah.

“It’s what he thinks, whether he says it or not,” replied Maud, hotly. “You ought to have more sense, Keziah. I don’t know that I ever felt so angry with you about anything. Whatever kind of a reason can you have for it? I can’t imagine, I am sure. You go and throw your chance of happiness away, just as if it were nothing. If it were only yourself, perhaps you might have a right to do it. What right have you to tamper with his happiness? I tell you, Keziah, badly as you imagine you served Thomas Hackbit, you were an angel to him compared with what you have been to James Elworthy. And yet Thomas Hackbit never deserved a tithe of your allegiance, while Elworthy—well, it doesn’t often fall to a woman’s lot to be loved as he has loved you.”

“I’ve never known you so unkind to me,” said Keziah, amid her sobs. “What would the world say, if I married him? Besides, I could never make him happy. You ought to know that.”

“What I do know is, that you’ve never tried. But you don’t seem at all to mind making him miserable. And fancy you talking about the world’s

opinion. There was a time, Keziah, when you would have laughed such an idea to scorn."

"I know that. But all you say about me only makes me more sure that I ought not to marry him."

"Well, you are very obstinate. I did think your trouble would have taught you more sense. If you can act in this way, I should not be surprised if you went and married somebody else, just to put yourself out of his reach; and if you did, I'd never speak to you again."

"How dare you talk to me so?" exclaimed Keziah, getting up from her seat, and drying her eyes. "All the rest you have said is true enough. But the last is an insult—nothing more nor less."

In the meantime, Elworthy had walked rapidly into Manchester, and gone straight to his hotel, where he ordered some wine, and asked for his bill and the time-table. There was a train he might easily catch back to Leamington. He lost no time. That evening, about half-past nine, Mrs. Beredith was startled by Elworthy's breaking in upon her in

a wild and buoyant manner. She had never feared so much for him before.

“You’ve seen her?” asked Mrs. Beredith, taking hold of both his hands.

“Oh, yes, I have seen her,” he answered. “Not Keziah, though; Mrs. Hackbit. And I’ve come to ask you a favour,” he went on hurriedly.

She looked alarmed. What was he going to ask?

“There will never be anything between me and her now,” he explained. “That is quite over. She has killed my love. I have no right to ask what I am going to ask. But you, who have let me call you mother now for a long time, will forgive me if I do wrong. I want you to let me ask Lucy to marry me.”

Mrs. Beredith started. She had long known Lucy’s secret regarding this man. Was her child to be made happy, then, after all?

But as she did not answer, Elworthy went on, with a fluency she had never noticed since the old days, when Keziah first came. “It is only a ruined sort of a life that I can offer her. But she is so gentle

and so kind ; she might take me. At least it can be no harm for me to ask her. I would be good to her."

"My dear Rupert," Mrs. Beredith replied, very gravely, "this is not a question for me to decide. But I think you had better wait."

"Wait !" cried the young man, with a strange laugh. "I have had some good practice in waiting. It is no more waiting I will do. Where is Lucy ? Is Miss Saltring with her ?"

"No ; Lucy is by herself, in the drawing-room."

Elworthy began to whistle an air, and lightly walked into the room—the very room where Keziah had laughed at him about his want of appreciation of jokes.

A little figure was seated near a table, in a neat brown dress ; and she got up with evident pleasure as Elworthy came in. "Lucy," he said, breaking the ice immediately, "you won't be offended ?" He had never called her Lucy before, and her heart beat fast. "Lucy, you know what a shattered life mine is, don't you ? It's not worth offering to any woman. But"—here he took her hands, and looked

at the gentle face—"Lucy, I must have some rest from this turmoil. I must end it some way; and if you refuse to take pity on me, I think I shall die."

He saw he had not made himself clear enough. "Lucy, will you be my wife, and try to make me forget? You are so good and so gentle: I believe you can do it, if anyone can."

"I both can and will," replied the girl, frankly; "for I have always loved you. I may tell it now."

Elworthy stayed to supper; and Miss Laura Saltring could not fail to be awake to the fact that something unusual had occurred. But she could not decide in her own mind whether Elworthy had gone mad, or was going to be married to Keziah immediately. She, however, kept silent, and trusted to her own power of observation to reveal something. She had become much more accommodating to Lucy and Mrs. Beredith since her father had thrown up his business, and all the property he had got by means of it. She had told Jubal that she would do anything rather than live at home under these changed conditions. And she had determined to keep her

situation, which was so easy, until Jubal should be able to marry her.

Elworthy went home, and found Gerald Harwyn was out seeing a patient. So he sat down in the surgery and wrote the following letter :—

DEAR MRS. HACKBIT,—I have taken the first step towards learning the lesson you set me, and am in a fair way to succeed well. Miss Beredith has promised to marry me. Your practical eye will recognise the womanly generosity she shows in taking the dregs of a cup another woman has drained. Well, all that is past. I trust the philosophy you possess in such a high degree may stand your friend as much as I might have done, had things been different. Remember me to Mrs. Towers, and thank her for her kindness. I would apologise for my rudeness in leaving her without a word. But no doubt you have explained; and no doubt she is extremely proud to have so high-souled a woman for her friend, whose rigour of purity quite surpasses my feeble comprehension. I will content myself now with something less of Puritanism, and something more of kindly womanhood. A man wants neither a stone nor an angel.

I remain, yours truly,

JAMES ELWORTHY.

And having written the letter, he posted it immediately with his own hand.

He returned from the post, and moodily sat down in the surgery, and lit a cigar. At length

the surgery was filled with smoke, so much so that Gerald Harwyn, opening the door at a late hour, exclaimed with a good deal of sharpness, "Hang it, what a cloud!"

A voice out of the cloud said, "All right, old fellow."

Gerald, who was at first quite unable to see Elworthy through the smoke, was not a little startled to hear his voice.

"You back!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, I am back," Elworthy responded lightly, but with a grimness of manner that betokened something had gone wrong.

"I hope you've not had any trouble?" inquired young Harwyn sympathetically, closing the door and sitting down.

"Oh, dear no," answered Elworthy, in the same short manner, "I have come out of the tempest into smooth water."

Gerald knew better. His friend wouldn't look like this, if all were well. "Look here, old fellow," he said coaxingly, "why not tell me all about it?"

"Haven't I just told you?"

“No, you haven’t. You’ve seen Mrs. Hackbit, of course?”

“Oh, yes, I have seen her.”

Harwyn concluded from this that perhaps Keziah had been unwilling to “fix the day,” so he remarked, in what he meant to be a consolatory way, “Well, you see, we must have a little patience with women. They’re odd creatures. My sister is, at any rate.”

It was clear to Elworthy that young Harwyn would get the facts out of him sooner or later, so he made a clean breast of it, and told him all that had occurred. Gerald appeared very little concerned at the first part of the narration. It was when he was told of the engagement to Lucy that he started, and exclaimed—

“Well, Elworthy, you have acted like a fool this time. Things done in temper are always the acts of a madman, and have disastrous results. Had you let things alone, Maud would have piloted you through, I know she would. But why you should insult Miss Beredith, by offering yourself to her under such circumstances, I don’t know.”

Elworthy puffed away, and allowed his friend to go on.

"I can't make it out, how it is people always give in just when they're going to win something, even though they've shown the courage of heroes up to that point."

"But, Harwyn," broke in his companion, in a voice full of suppressed trouble, "you don't mean to suggest that—you don't mean to imply that Kizzy"—his voice had a sob in it as he mentioned her name—"would have. . . ."

"I mean to say this," rejoined Harwyn, hotly, "that had you not made such a confounded ass of yourself, you might have been married to her in a few weeks."

Elworthy heaved a deep sigh. "Ah!" he answered, "you've only heard my report of it. You didn't see her look nor hear her voice, or you wouldn't wonder, and you wouldn't blame me so."

"I tell you this," said Harwyn, excitedly, "that you are preparing to make chapter two blacker than chapter one. How dare you ask an honest woman to marry you when you are in love with another ;

and when you know in your heart, if you like to face the fact, that the reasons you assigned have nothing to do with it, nothing at all? You have used one woman's love for you, to stab another whom you love. Do you call that manly? I call it cowardly. Why should you punish Lucy because you are angry with Keziah?"

"In what way should I punish Lucy?"

"Are you blind, that you can't see a yard before you? Don't you know that you've made her a promise it's impossible for you to keep?"

"Do you think I shall back out of marrying her?"

"Oh, Elworthy," said Gerald, twisting and breaking up a quill pen in his vexation, "is the man who could follow another man's wife about as you did, the man to be faithful in the fullest sense to a woman he does not love, and has married to spite the woman he does love?"

"You've been a very true friend to me," was the reply, after a few seconds, in a low voice. "I know I deserve what you've been saying, every word of it. But, Harwyn, her manner drove me beside myself."

“I’ll tell you why. You went unprepared.”

“Unprepared!” exclaimed Elworthy. “How so? Unprepared! I like that. I had long enough to prepare in, at any rate.”

“You allowed your love for her to so absorb you, that you did not give a proper consideration to her state of mind. Otherwise, you would have seen nothing to drive you away in what she said, or in her manner.”

“Why didn’t you tell me all this before?”

“What chance had I? You would never be spoken to.”

“Hang it, but you should have made me. But as you seem to be Solomon, tell me what to do now.”

“Doesn’t your own sense suggest anything?”

“My sense! You’ve just said I had none.”

“But you are more reasonable now.”

“There’s only one way, and that’s impossible.”

“I shall take you for an Irishman, if you talk like that. There is only one way, I say, and that is possible.”

“What is it?”

“You must go to-morrow, and tell Lucy the whole truth. Not a part, mind, but the whole.”

“And if I do that, what a cur I shall look ; and I should forfeit her mother’s friendship, which I value so highly.”

“Ah, well, you’ll have to put up with some of that. You can’t expect to come off scot-free. Why should you, indeed ?”

“And if I break off with Lucy,” went on Elworthy, “Keziah will never have anything to do with me after the letter I have sent her.”

“You’ve got yourself into a deuce of a mess, that I’ll allow ; and you’ll have to go through many a smart before you get things to the point they were at when you met Keziah to-day.”

“Well, I think I’ll go to bed,” said Elworthy ; and he went away with a slow and weary step.

When he was gone, young Harwyn sat down and wrote a long letter to his sister, in which he pleaded eloquently for his friend.





CHAPTER V.

DECISION AND INDECISION.



ON the Monday morning following, Elworthy was summoned to Stone Court; but on his way back he planned to call at the Berediths'.

He was quite resolved to follow Gerald Harwyn's advice, and tell Lucy the whole truth. The sun had been shining all the morning, and Elworthy thought more cheerfully of his position, as a man sometimes will when nature smiles, and he is not called upon to act immediately. No doubt Lucy would understand, he said to himself over and over again, as he rode along the pleasant lanes. Yes, Lucy would understand, and Mrs. Beredith would forgive him for a rash act that she herself had been

opposed to. But as he became aware that his horse was bringing him rapidly into the actual presence of his difficulty, he became less complacent; and in a cowardly manner—and who has not felt such cowardice as this at some time in his life?—wished earnestly that some patient or some messenger would confront him, and forcibly put off this visit.

However, no such luck befell him, if luck it might be termed; and he found himself drawing rein in front of Mrs. Beredith's house, with its prettily draped windows. He was painfully conscious of his heart thumping as he dismounted and threw his reins over the palings. He saw one of the upstairs curtains move, and for the moment he almost thought that, if he looked, he should see the small head with the short black curls shining out on him as of old.

He rang the bell. Yes: Miss Beredith was at home; so was Miss Saltring. Mrs. Beredith was out, shopping. This information gave him relief. For the moment he thought it was a means of escape. He might justifiably put off calling if Mrs. Beredith were from home.

While he was thinking about it, Mrs. Beredith herself appeared. It was clear there was not this escape for him.

She smiled pleasantly, and remarked on the fineness of the weather, and asked Rupert's opinion about hiring a brougham and driving to Kenilworth. "You see, we may not get such a fine day again for a long while at this time of the year," she said, in the pretty, rippling, contented tone which was her characteristic.

She became aware he was not noticing what she was saying. Having entered the drawing-room, Elworthy strode to the fireplace, put his foot on the shining steel of the fender, and looked at his reflection in the mirror on the mantelpiece. He saw his features were fixed and strained: he began to feel angry with Mrs. Beredith for having allowed him to take this fatal step. "She has known my heart all along," he thought. "She ought to have known this would never do." Then he remembered that she had advised him not to take the step.

As for Mrs. Beredith, she was thinking that he was well rid of Keziah. Keziah had changed. It

might be better, after all, that he should marry Lucy. He would feel strange at first, of course. That was natural. But afterwards, Lucy would be so good and so kind—as he himself had said—that he would find rest ; and he could not help growing to love so good and gentle a creature as Lucy, in time.

She did not know how much her own love for Lucy entered into all this, and influenced her way of looking at the case. So seeing his mood, she went out to send her daughter to him. Elworthy instinctively knew what she would do, and dreaded the coming moment. He heard a creaking of the door, and did not look round. But he saw in the mirror the reflection of a shy figure dressed in brown, with a pretty flush on the cheeks, coming into the room. He turned round ; how could he do otherwise ?

The shy figure glided towards him, and put out two little hands, with snowy white frills round the wrists, confidingly and calmly, while she looked at him with glad eyes, and lips quivering with a smile. He took the hands in his ; that was not to be avoided. And now came his task. He knew his

first word ought to convey something of his meaning, and he shrank from uttering the word that should cause the withdrawal of the little hands, and drive away that flickering smile. All that morning he had tried to plan something to say to her; but now he could recollect nothing he had thought of saying. After a moment or two's silence, during which he had still held the little hands, though loosely and without emotion such as the touch of Keziah's dress brushing past him would have excited, he stammered out—

“ You have made a bad bargain, Lucy—in taking me, I mean. It has not gone far. Don't you think you had better reconsider it ? ”

He was inwardly cursing himself for the round-about method he was adopting, and he saw in a moment by her face that his intention had miscarried. The poor girl only interpreted his words according to her love for him, and not at all in the way he had meant.

“ It is not a bad bargain if I do not think it one,” Lucy said. “ It cannot be a bad bargain that makes me so happy.”

He felt her words as so many chains thrown around him ; and though a woman's hand was binding him, he felt himself powerless. How could he have the inhumanity to break out after these words, and say " You have mistaken what I mean. I mean I wish myself out of the bargain ! " Right or wrong, be the consequences what they might be, it was morally impossible for him to say what he had to say, then. He must find out some other plan.

He dropped her hands now, and said to her, in a voice that sounded choked, " I have a patient to see now, Lucy, and must go." She made no remonstrance at his cutting the interview so short. She felt no distrust of him. She felt like her mother did : it was but natural he should be just a little strange, at first. So she opened the door for him : and when he went away without kissing her, felt no resentment. She was too happy for that, quite too happy.

When he had ridden away, Mrs. Beredith said, smiling affectionately on her daughter, " How good of him to come in this morning, Lucy ! We couldn't have expected that, you know. He has done it to

show how much in earnest he is. You could not have been hurt, Lucy, if he had not come for two or three days. You must not make severe demands upon him, you know, Lucy. After all that has happened, he can't be just like another man."

"Oh, no," replied Lucy, shaking her head, with a faint smile, "he can never be like another man. It is not me you need tell that to."

Laura Saltring had come into the room, and Mrs. Beredith said to her, "So our Lucy will, perhaps, be married before you, Laura, after all."

"She will have to be quick about it, then," retorted Laura, pertly.

Mrs. Beredith, on hearing this, was startled into feeling some interest in another subject than her daughter's engagement.

"Then it can't be young Rimmon you are going to marry," she remarked rather sharply.

Laura laughed lightly. "And why should it not be?" she asked.

"Because he's a mere boy," returned Mrs. Beredith, with no smile on her face now; "and because he has no position."

This annoyed Laura, who could have told more than she chose to tell. So she said spitefully, "I don't see why anyone need trouble about me and my marriage. Jubal Rimmon is the property of no other woman, I suspect."

Lucy and her mother both winced under this remark. They understood it.

"And do you think," broke out Mrs. Beredith, with little discretion, "that Lucy is going to marry the property of another woman?"

"If she's going to marry Dr. Elworthy, I certainly think so," said Laura.

"That's a very unkind remark," said Lucy, not showing much force, it must be owned. "You ought to know better than that, and you do know better."

"Well, how long has he ceased to be the property of Mrs. Hackbit, then?"

Neither lady could speak. Could they say, since yesterday?

"I know very well that he went to see her the other day. At any rate he went to Manchester; and he was seen by some one I know, at Man-

chester, and what other purpose could he have in going there?"

"He did go. I know all about it," said Mrs. Beredith, defending her daughter's position with some warmth. "And all connection was broken off between them."

"I wonder he went over to do that," replied Laura; "he might have written it."

"You seem to know a great deal about it," said Mrs. Beredith, affecting a sneer. "Perhaps you can tell us what we ought to have done."

"Well," said Laura, "since you ask me, I think you might have waited to see whether Dr. Elworthy's purpose was fixed, or, which is far the most likely, whether he had merely acted under vexation that Keziah wouldn't marry him to-morrow. In that case, you may depend he didn't mean to be accepted."

Lucy looked appealingly at her mother, and began to cry.

"Miss Saltring," said Mrs. Beredith, severely, "we have borne a good deal from you since you have been with us, in one way or another; but you have gone a little too far this time."

Poor Mrs. Beredith; she did not know how much of the self-regarding human element was entering into what she was saying, and that she was most of all angry because of the truth of Laura's remarks.

"I am very sorry to do it," went on Mrs. Beredith, "but I must request you to go home to your father, as soon as may be; and I will communicate with him."

Now this was a very real shock to Laura, who had never before seen such a result follow her plain speaking. Laura had credited Mrs. Beredith with the faculty, learnt in trade, of not getting vexed with people, whatever the provocation might be; so she stared at Mrs. Beredith's white face, and wondered if she had heard aright. There was a dead silence for a moment, and then Lucy, in tears, implored her mother not to send Laura away.

Laura stood quite unmoved; she did not care about seeing the persecuted praying for their persecutors; it put the persecutors into such a ridiculous position. So she chose to get into a passion; and flinging a highly sarcastic look at Lucy, she said—

“You are addressing your petition to the wrong quarter. ’Tis I you should beg to stay if you want to influence the matter at all. But your ignorance is of no consequence. If you begged me a hundred times, I would not stop; though I have no doubt when you reflect on it, you’d much prefer my stopping, for you’ve no nice reason to assign for my hasty departure.” So, icily smiling, she quitted the apartment, and was soon heard in the room above, occupied about her packing.





CHAPTER VI.

MADELINE'S STORY.

WELL," said Miss Saltring, marching into her father's dining-room on her arrival from Leamington, "you appear to be pretty jolly on the whole." So saying, she sat down and began to unloose her things, and requested that a servant might come and take her boots off.

"I will do it," said Mrs. Saltring. "You see we have only one servant now."

"What a very pleasant state of affairs!" said Laura. "Thank Heaven, I shan't have to endure it long."

Her relatives were wondering how long they should have to endure Laura.

“Where has she gone?” asked Laura, looking at no one in particular.

“If you mean Madeline,” responded Mr. Saltring, “she is not at home at present; and I don’t think she would have come home and not come to kiss any of us, like you.”

“The world is false,” said Laura; “and I’m no worse than other people, for not pretending more than I feel. I must say, however, it’s an agreeable surprise not to find you all tearing your hair after the letter you must have received from my benefactress, as you style Mrs. Beredith.”

“Come, get some tea,” put in the mother. “I can’t bear discussions; they are no good in themselves, and never lead to any, I think.”

“Pretty good table, on the whole,” remarked Laura. “I thought you were all living on porridge, perhaps; but I find it much as usual.”

Laura did not know that the little extras had been procured because she was coming home, that she might not feel the change too keenly.

“And so you are an estate-agent now, are you, papa? What a droll thing!”

"I am two or three things," replied Mr. Saltring.
"And I don't find it at all droll. It goes along very well indeed. I shall make something by my grapes, and vegetables, and fruit generally, next summer, I hope. We shall pull along, I know," he went on, addressing his wife; "shan't we, mother?"

"Well, I've not come to be a burden and a drawback, I know," said Laura. "I shan't be here long. . . . You said just now something about Miss Madeline being from home. Where is that?"

"Here, of course," said Mr. Saltring, becoming irritated.

"I must say, I wonder at it," replied Laura. "No girl with a grain of right feeling would stay and eat at your table now, when you are beginning the world again."

"Why do you judge without your book?" rejoined Mr. Saltring, hotly. "You would have known all about it, if you had not objected to our giving you any details in our letters. Madeline, God bless her, could have left us, had she wished it, for a much better home: but she chose rather to stand by our

fallen fortunes, and has added to our income very considerably by teaching singing and music. She never looks dull now, since we've had something to make us look dull sometimes ; but she cheers us all, and makes everything go right ; and she helps mother with the children, now we've only one maid : and she stitches and mends. I never saw a girl like her."

Mrs. Saltring was looking all the time at Laura, giving confirmatory nods at intervals while her husband was speaking.

The door being pushed open at this moment, a very lovely boy of about five years came timidly in, and looked shyly at the stranger.

"Come, Bertie," said Mrs. Saltring.

He went to her, but kept his eyes all the time on the stranger.

"So that's the child they saddled you with," said Laura, "is it ? I should think Keziah might have had him back now."

"Once more you are at fault, Laura," replied her father. "Keziah would have gladly had him back, but we would not give him up, he had grown so dear

to us all. Madeline would have broken her heart, I believe."

"Why, the child's the very image of her," said Laura, staring at him.

"We have all been struck by the likeness," said Mr. Saltring.

"But have drawn no conclusion, I daresay?" said Laura.

"There is no conclusion to draw," Mr. Saltring asserted decidedly, getting up from the table and walking out of the room.

Laura, however, smiled a good deal to herself as she finished her tea, and annoyed her mother not a little by it.

Mr. Saltring thought, in a despairing way, "What have I done to have such a daughter?" He would doubtless have gone on thinking sadly for some time, had not a caller interrupted him; it was Mr. Rockingham.

That gentleman had so serious a look upon his face, that Mr. Saltring was certain it was no ordinary business that had brought him.

"I hope you have a little time to spare," the

vicar began ; “ for mine will be a long story if I am to make myself plain. It’s a most extraordinary thing I’ve come about, and a very painful one. It is quite private and personal ; and I show my great confidence in you in coming to you as I do now, to tell you what many of my most intimate friends have never heard me mention.”

“ Never fear, sir,” was the reply. And now the two sat down : they had been standing until this moment. The clergyman’s face was very pale. He tried to begin once, and had to stop. Then making a great effort, he said—

“ I had a dear sister once, Saltring.” Mr. Saltring’s interest immediately showed itself in his face. “ She was like nobody in the family, and she didn’t get on quite well with her mother and the rest of them. So they all found it convenient for her to go and study music in Germany ; for she had a great talent for music, and a wonderful voice. Well,” said the clergyman, with a pause, “ she never came back.”

“ She died ? ” put in Mr. Saltring, interrogatively.

“ No,” said the clergyman, scarcely above a whisper, “ it was worse than that. She eloped. It

was a bad man she went away with. And though so many years have passed, I have been making an endless and fruitless search for her. So that is why I have travelled so much, as everyone else has believed, for my own pleasure. There is not a land I have not visited, nor a town, where it was possible she might be yet living, or where I might find her grave, if she were gone."

Mr. Saltring had taken the clergyman by the hand, and was gripping it in a manner that would have testified to his sympathy if he had uttered no word. "But have you found no one at all to help you in your search?" he asked.

"Oh, no," replied Mr. Rockingham, with a wan smile that looked so very dreary that it went right to the heart of his friend. "There is a new point of interest, however, in the story, perhaps the most important of all, now. There is someone who may be really the right one to search for her with me, who may have a claim to do so. I believe I have found her child."

"Where?" asked Mr. Saltring, with breathless interest.

“My good friend,” said the clergyman, laying both his hands on Mr. Saltring’s shoulders, “in your house.”

Relieved of his secret, Mr. Rockingham rushed on, in a manner quite foreign to his usual method of talking.

“If it is not true, if I am labouring under a delusion, why is she the living image of her? Why does she sing *her* songs, in just *her* tone? Why has she got just her trick of closing her eyes slowly, and darting them open, till you feel it like a spell. I never saw but one girl do like that, just as she does it. Her eyelids droop till she appears half-dreaming, and then suddenly lift themselves all fire upon you.”

Mr. Saltring, hearing this described, applied it to yet another. This was a trick of little Bertram’s too. When first he had come to them, they had been all individually struck by the great size of his eyes, compared with what they at first thought them; and this was all through his habit of drooping his eyelids, unless when speaking or being spoken to.

"I tell you," went on Mr. Rockingham, "she's as like her as two human beings can be, to her very finger-tips, which I have watched on the piano, to the very shape of her ear, which is the neatest I ever saw. She has my sister's gliding walk."

Mr. Saltring, was so much astounded by all this, that he could think of nothing to say.

"I want to ask you, can you throw any light, Saltring? Where does she come from? She has surely told you."

"I have never asked her," replied Mr. Saltring huskily. "We none of us have. It would be like not trusting her."

"Then you must ask her for my sake, now you know about this."

"It is my duty, and I will, though it goes against the grain to press the girl for confidence she has withheld; but if it is true, it must be best for her that you should know it; and she is very fond of you."

"Will you ask her where she got the little prayer-book she uses? I have tried to get it into my hands when she has called after service at the

vicarage; but she always holds it tightly. She never puts it down to look at anything."

"I will do all I can," replied Mr. Saltring.

And the two men, so different in station, clasped hands in a strong and common sympathy which spoke them brothers in the great human family.

Mr. Saltring took care that Laura should not meet Madeline on her return, which was rather later than usual that evening; but Laura saw her come, heard her mother go to meet her, and the two went together immediately into the little sitting-room upstairs, which was the sanctum of the establishment.

It was the case of Joseph's brethren over again. No matter what Madeline did, Laura hated her yet the more for it. She hated her now, for being in her mother's confidence in this manner, and for being of use to that mother. She was not going to trouble her head, she said to herself, about Madeline, who had been picked up out of the streets. She would make as speedy arrangements as possible to reign in a house of her own, and with this view she sat down and wrote to Jubal, with what result we shall learn later on.

She would have laid down her pen, and gone and listened, if she had had any idea that a conversation of such import was taking place in the little sitting-room. But fortunately workers of evil have not their *genii* in real life to inform them of everything at the right moment.

"My dear Madeline," Mrs. Saltring was saying, "you know me too well to doubt my love for you now; and if I ask you any questions that may look like mistrust of you, I beg of you not to take it in that way. I am sure no motive such as curiosity or mistrust could have ever given me the courage to ask you what I am going to ask. Indeed, it is harder for me than you can think."

"I know, I know what you are going to ask me," replied Madeline, covering her face with her hands. "Don't. I will tell you without. I knew it would come to this. But I was so loath to give up my home, where I have been so happy; and when I have told you, I must go."

"How can you speak so, Madeline, my child?" said Mrs. Saltring, beginning to cry; "just as if

anything, no matter what, could induce us to let you go, unless to a better home."

"Oh," responded Madeline, "you good, good people always say these words, that kind of word; but it feels all different when you have heard the truth, when you have to get used to it, and think about it every day after. It does kill love; it does," she said passionately. "But I knew it must come. I could expect nothing else. How should I? I have been too, too fortunate in having had this brief respite."

"Madeline," said Mrs. Saltring, "the love we feel for you cannot die, cannot change. Oh, that I could burn these words into your heart till you could never forget them."

"I believe you mean them," returned Madeline; "of course I do. But I must tell you now, whatever comes of it. You have a right to ask me. I wouldn't have believed you could have kept me in the house so long without asking me. It is that you are not the least bit like the world, you and Mr. Saltring. Where shall I begin?" she cried, shutting her little hands tightly, and looking away from her friend.

"Shall I help you to begin?" asked Mrs. Saltring, gently.

"Ah, if you could," replied the girl; "but how can you?"

"Whose is the little Prayer-book you use at church?"

The girl started. "My mother's," she said; "my poor mother's."

"And who was your mother, my poor child?"

"I don't know," said Madeline. "She would never let me know that. She said she couldn't have one of the oldest names in England dragged in the dirt; that is all I know."

This seemed so conclusive, to Mrs. Saltring's mind, that but for the strong warnings given her by her husband, she would have blurted out all that Mr. Rockingham had revealed. Madeline drew the little Prayer-book out of her pocket, and her tears rained down on its cover. "She gave it to me," said Madeline, "when she bade me go away, go away and starve, that's what she said."

"How could she have been so cruel?"

"Cruel!" said Madeline, flashing her great eyes

suddenly on Mrs. Saltring. "She cruel! It is because you never knew her, you say that. She told me to starve rather than live the life that lay before me where I was—that was all; that was not cruel. It was after her husband had left her."

"She was married, then?" Mrs. Saltring asked.

"Oh, yes, she was married to my father."

"Did she ever tell you how she met him?"

"No," said the girl wearily.

"Then what do you remember first?"

"I remember my mother and father quarrelling when they came home from the concert hall. That was when I was quite little."

"What did they quarrel about?" Mrs. Saltring inquired, hoping to get some clue.

"Oh, different things; about other women, and other men, and about father's going to America, and spending all the profits; and then he went to America again, and never came back. Then poor mamma was taken up by the proprietor of the concert hall, and he pretended to marry her; but of course he couldn't marry her, when we didn't know whether her husband was dead or not. I was

brought out there afterwards. Then my new father, as he made me call him, used to drink and gamble : and he got into debt, and all our things were sold : and a young medical student lent him some money. . . .” Here her voice faltered a good deal : but she went desperately on. “ He was there on a holiday.”

“ Where was it, my dear ? ”

“ At Baden, that was. He seemed to have plenty of money : and he said if he could marry me, he would set father on his feet. Father raved and insisted, in spite of my youth ; and I couldn't see poor mamma so miserable : how could I ? And I thought if I married him, it would at least make it better for her : so I married him. And it was not until after my baby was born that I found out it had all been a deception : I had not been married at all, and my father knew it at the time. They took my baby away : I don't know what was done with it. I have been trying to find out ever since ; God knows I would not forsake it. Then I tried to go on as I had done before : but fresh difficulties arose ; and this man I had to call father laid such a plan before

me for restoring his fortunes that my poor mother arranged my flight."

"Oh, how could she send you away, to what might be worse?" Mrs. Saltring exclaimed.

"You do not understand," was Madeline's reply; "she was powerless to protect me; she knew that, and I knew it. It was but a choice of evils. She gave me all the money she had, and this little prayer-book you asked me about."

And the girl, having told her story, laid her head on Mrs. Saltring's shoulder, and wept aloud. The little prayer-book fell from her lap, and the cover opened; and in it was plainly legible, "O. R. A. gift from her brother."





CHAPTER VI .

KINSFOLK.



AT eleven o'clock the same evening, when Mr. Saltring entered the vicar's study, he found him at his table, with his books spread out, and his shaded reading-lamp lighting the table only.

The vicar looked up eagerly as Mr. Saltring entered.

"Look," he said, unshading his lamp, "let me read in your face whether I have been astray, and have all to go through over again, in a new search."

"We cannot be certain," was the reply, "all in a moment; we could hardly expect that." The vicar's face clouded. "But I am as near sure as any

man can be without positive proof." He then proceeded to repeat Madeline's story, word for word as Mrs. Saltring had told it to him.

"Now, tell me this," said Mr. Rockingham, when he had heard it all with an overwhelming eagerness in his face. "Has she any idea why she was asked these questions?"

"Not the least in the world. And now this is all settled so far, what shall I do next?"

"It is I who shall do what is done next. You will let me see her to-morrow, if I call?"

"She will be going out to give a lesson rather early, and I fear it would be almost useless to try and persuade her not to be punctual at an appointment."

"Ah, I am like a young man," said the clergyman; "I cannot curb my impatience. Where is she giving her lesson to-morrow morning?"

"At Major Perry's."

"Then I will walk over there with her. Will you tell her that?"

The next morning saw Madeline and the clergyman walking briskly along a country road. Madeline

was unusually quiet after her confession of the night before. She could not help wondering, what this clergyman, who made so much of her, would think, if he knew the truth. He was quiet too, but from another reason. It is easy in privacy to plan a conversation, but quite another thing to put the plan into action when the time comes. The one who has imagined and planned the scene may act his part correctly, but how is the other actor to act the part written for him, if he has never seen it ?

“My dear,” began the clergyman gently, when they had entered a little wood, “I want you to look at this portrait, and tell me if you ever saw anyone like it.” And he took from his pocket, with a trembling hand, a portrait painted on ivory, of a very lovely girl.

She blushed slightly as she looked at it, and her first thought was, how like it was to the reflection that greeted her every morning at her mirror. Then her face turned very white as she looked further, and her lips parted, and she cried with a terror-stricken look, “She’s got that locket on !”

Mr. Rockingham now took her hands, clasped

together as they were, in one of his own. "My dear child," he said, "tell me what locket you mean."

"Oh, I can't, I can't," she cried, trying to release her hands, "it cannot matter to you in any way. You have no right to question me, indeed you haven't," she said piteously.

"I may have more right to question you than anyone you have seen for a very long time," he replied sadly, for he had imagined her taking it in quite a different way, when he had thought out the scene in his study beforehand. "Look, I will begin to trust you. Shall I tell you whose portrait that is?"

She had her eyes now wide open, fixed on a last year's bird's nest, in one of the bushes near by, and she did not see how he trembled, nor how pale he was.

"Madeline, she was my sister; she was *my* sister. Now answer me, have I no right at all to ask you any question?"

She still stared at the bird's nest, with that frozen look in her face, and did not answer.

“Do you understand me?” he said. “That portrait is the portrait of my sister, for whom I have been searching many, many years, of bitter hopeless search.”

She suddenly brought her great eyes away from the bird's nest, and on to his face, unclasped her hands, and placed them on her head, in a bewildered fashion.

“I don't think I quite understand,” she said, brokenly. “I can't collect myself. Let me think.” And she turned her eyes once more towards the deserted nest; and he let her remain in silence as she would. Then he said, ever so gently, after some moments had passed, “Did you ever see the inside of a locket like that in the picture?”

“Yes,” responded the girl, in a far-away voice, as if in a dream. “She always wore it.”

“Her brother's likeness was in it.” He gave a great sob. “Oh, my child,” he said, “look at me. Am I nothing like that portrait?”

She shook her head slowly from side to side. “No, nothing at all like him. He was—handsome,” she said, with a blush.

“ Ah,” he returned, with a strange laugh, “ and I am not ; that is what you mean. Well, it is quite true ; I know that. My hair was black and curly once, and my face had not all these furrows. Oh, time and trouble change everything.” And he thought with a pang, that time and trouble might have so changed her that he might have passed her again and again and never known it.

The girl began to grow less bewildered. “ My mother’s brother,” she said, “ was called Philip ; I know that.” There had been no explanation between them, that that likeness resembled the girl’s mother. It had been taken for granted somehow.

“ Should you know your mother’s writing ? ”

“ Oh, yes, quite well ; it was like no one else’s.”

“ I know that.” He drew from his pocket a packet of old letters. She uttered a little cry. There was no doubt about it. It was, indeed, her mother’s writing. She recognised it before the packet was in her hand, and while the writing was upside down before her. She trembled all over like an aspen, and waited for him to say something.

“O my darling,” he said, “will you not go and look for her with me?”

A sudden pain seized her. What would this brother think if he found her as she was, if indeed she still lived? What would he think of her if he knew her story? And a hundred things flashed into her mind that her mother had said to her about the pride of the family to which she belonged, and the unsullied names they had all borne for so long.

“Oh!” she said, in an accent of fear, “I must not do it. It would kill her, even if she still lives. She often said she was dead to you, to you all. Once,” cried the girl, in a sudden access of energy, “she said she saw you; it was at Baden. She was singing, and she said she saw you in the audience, and she had to be carried out. Were you there then, in——?”

The clergyman leaned against a tree for support. “I was there, and I remember it well. But that could not have been . . . she. O God, it is too cruel. I will find her,” he cried. “Go with me to Baden. Let us start to-morrow.”

The girl looked with horror in her face. “They

may have gone from there : they must have gone," she said. "My mother always said she should take her opportunity of going to search for her husband, too, and live honestly, if possible."

He winced at her words. They became conscious, too, that somebody was coming towards them through the wood, lightly singing an air from an opera. The clergyman was angry at the interruption : nothing more. But the girl, her eyes strained larger than ever, stared at the approaching figure with an accumulated horror in her face, not to be described in words : then, without turning her eyes away, she flung herself into the arms of her new-found protector, and pointed with a white, trembling finger. The figure was getting very near now, and stopped singing, to laugh lightly, and to remark, "So Monsieur the priest is having his little pastime," and was about to pass on, when he caught sight of Madeline.

"O Jupiter," he cried, "and ten thousand thunders, here is the other of them ! *Oh Ciel*, this is too embarrassing, quite too embarrassing indeed." He returned to his old manner, and, smiling, said to

the shrinking girl, "Why did you not look for me and find me, too? I would have been found of you, for you are young and beautiful, and would fill my hall. And your mother is no longer young, and no longer pretty. Monsieur the priest, I beg your pardon," he said, raising his hat, "this is my daughter. I forgive you the enjoyment you may have had to her expense. Come," he said, extending his hand, "it is a most fortunate circumstance now."

"Don't come near her," cried the clergyman, clenching his fist. "You will have to give proof you are her father, before I shall let her approach you. Who are you, and what is your name? Your name is villain, whatever your other name is."

The stranger drew from his pocket, first a cigarette case, and then a card case, upon which was printed:—

Eugène Pelbois.

Mr. Rockingham paled still more. It was the name he knew too well as that of his sister's husband.

"What have you done with my sister?" he cried out, seizing the foreigner somewhere between his cravat, collar, and shirt.

"My dear sir," was the conjurer's reply, "can you not address me without disarranging so much my cravat? Which of them is your sister? I beg your pardon."

"This girl's mother, you fiend in human form. By Heaven, had I another coat on, I'd thrash you within an inch of your life, you cur. Where is my sister, I say?"

"Are you the amiable brother for whom she weeps, then?" he inquired aggravatingly.

"Where is she?" hissed the clergyman, looking dangerously at him. "Take me to her."

"Well, I do not object," returned the Frenchman, "seeing that Mademoiselle accompanies us."

"Madeline shall never go with you."

"There is a law in England," said the foreigner, smiling.

"No law shall ever part this girl from me, unless she wishes it. Try it. Do what you can."

"Under these charming circumstances, I do not think I will take you to the place where Madame your sister is, probably weeping."

"Hold," said the parson. "Don't try that. I

shall never let you out of my sight again, till I have found her. I will follow you night and day."

"How very droll," replied Pelbois, "to see a priest turned into a bull dog, as my most agreeable friend, Winterfold, does say: a university expression, I believe."

Madeline all this time was leaning heavily on her uncle's arm, her eyes staring and her lips parted. "Don't fear, dearest," he said to her encouragingly.

"Are you going to be reasonable," he said to the foreigner, "and take us at once to where my sister is?"

"That cannot be done in five minutes, even by conjuring," replied he, still smiling. "She is in Manchester, where I have taken a hall, it is some weeks."

"What were you doing here?" asked Mr. Rockingham, a new thought striking him.

"Well, I have come," said Monsieur, blandly, "to claim a small remittance that did not arrive, in its usual way, of some one in this neighbourhood."

"Who is it?"

"In all respect, I must decline to tell you,

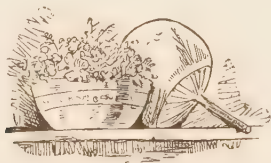
though it would be my wish to gratify so amiable a brother-in-law."

"Call me that again, and I'll knock you down."

Monsieur Pelbois, who made a practice of succeeding rather by policy than by courage, cunning rather than manliness, was considerably cowed by these words and the look that accompanied them. He dropped his ironical tone entirely, and expressed himself quite willing to accompany them, then and there, to the station.

The clergyman was silent a moment or two, meditating what to do. "Yes," he said at length, "we will go now straight to the station, as you suggest."

It was no moment for Madeline to remember the singing lesson she had been going to give; she never once thought of it. All her pent-up love and longing for her mother welled up within her. She was ready to go at once, and strong to go.





CHAPTER VIII.

DEATH-BRINGING JOY.

THE United Arts Hotel, Manchester, was next door to the Folly Theatre, and was patronised greatly by theatrical personages. It was there that the Springwoods were usually entertained by their friends: in fact, they almost lived at the United Arts during their season. On the other side of the hotel was the Folly Music and Entertainment Hall, which had been taken by Monsieur Pelbois for a time: and the front of which was plentifully decorated with coloured placards, depicting this able conjurer's miraculous performance.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon referred to in the last chapter, a cab stopped in front of the

United Arts, where several young gentlemen, among whom was Jubal Rimmon, stood lounging about the door. Jubal was not the only member of the party who started with surprise on seeing Mr. Rockingham alight. Winterfold, who was of the party, appeared to be much struck, and pulling Denleigh by the sleeve, he whispered, "Dence take it if that isn't Rockingham."

"Some one you know, then?" said Denleigh.

"I should rather think so," was the reply. "Comes to our house far too often. I vote we make tracks instantly. He'll be coming and speaking to us."

They would probably have carried this suggestion into action, had not young Springwood, who was also of the party, exclaimed, "By Jove!" in such a tone that there was nothing possible but to stand still and stare.

Mr. Rockingham was in the act of helping Madeline out of the cab. No wonder Springwood exclaimed. The waxen face, lit by its great dazzling eyes, and surrounded by a halo of gold, would have made anybody stop and stare.

“ Oh,” broke out Winterfold, “ fancy seeing such a creature as that coming out of an ordinary cab ! By Jove, though, she beats those other two, doesn’t she ? ” By “ the other two,” we may presume Maud and Keziah were meant.

It was now Springwood’s turn to exclaim, for Monsieur Pelbois next tripped lightly from the cab. “ By ——,” he said, “ if she’s going to join his company, they’ll spoil our takings.”

These young gentlemen moved on one side as the party of three entered the hotel, and then closed in once more, following them with their eyes. When they had mounted the staircase, and were no longer visible, Springwood said in a loud tone of voice, which was his usual one, “ I never saw a piece of flesh like that before : and not made-up a whit, I’ll swear. Let my dad set eyes on her, he’ll bribe her over to our company. All the rest of our girls might go to the deuce. I tell you,” he remarked solemnly, “ I wouldn’t have believed there could be such a girl. She looks as well close to as the make-ups do at a distance. What an oval her face is ! And did you ever see such lips ! I dare bet any of you a hundred

pounds she has a fine set of teeth, too. I dare swear she isn't pinched in or padded a bit."

But while this player of low comedy was discussing Madeline's market value as a stage-article, he did not appear conscious that none of the others were attending to what he said. They were in earnest conversation themselves, and not about the girl, for a wonder. The comedian, when he had stopped talking, listened to them.

"For my part, I don't care a ——," said Jubal. "There's nobody he can tell that matters, to me."

"All very well," replied Winterfold, "but how about me? If he goes to our house, and tells my father he's seen me here, what a row there'll be! This place is known all over the world as a bad one, and I tell you I don't think I should go back home, if I thought Rockingham would split; and he's sure to."

"He's here himself, at any rate," said Denleigh, winking. "He'd have to tell that too. Strikes me he'll be only too glad to keep dark, on his own account, and is inwardly cursing you for having seen him."

“Really, now,” said Winterfold, beginning to relax the severity of his countenance, “I shouldn’t have thought he was that sort. I never thought of that.”

“Oh, those parsons are sly dogs,” observed Springwood, breaking in on the conversation. “We know that. There are more parsons hanging about our green-rooms than I could count up in a minute.”

“Wonder what the girl’s going to do,” chimed in Jubal.

“She’ll be a mesmerist or a somnambulist, or a thought-reader, or something of that sort, you’ll see,” said Springwood. “Oh, what a setting her head had on its shoulders! I never saw anything like it. She’s quite thrown away on that low music hall.”

“You’re in a deuced hurry to take it all for certain,” said Jubal. “Supposing she don’t belong to Pelbois at all. She may belong to Mr. Rockingham.”

A showy young woman joined the party at this moment, and proved the friendly relations she was

on by pulling Winterfold's hair, and asking him if he were up to snuff: whereupon she was told by Mr. Springwood to bag her head, as some real beauty had passed that way not a minute before. The young lady pricked up her ears with evident interest, and requested to be informed who it was. She was told it was nobody she knew, or would ever know.

"Look here," observed Jubal; "you clear out. There's a gentleman that knows me gone in there."

"Perhaps he'll tell your mother," suggested the syren, making a grimace at Jubal.

Jubal's face clouded for a moment. What would his mother think if she knew the life he was leading?

The young lady showed no disposition to move on, however, and requested to be informed which of them was going to treat her to a tongue-loosener, by which epithet she indicated a glass of brandy. All of them expressed themselves willing, if she would be off! She chose to take it from them all.

They had been standing on some steps, and as she passed down them, chinking her money in her hand, she showed a very tiny foot. "Put it under your skirts," cried Springwood contemptuously.

"We've seen a foot just now: and it hadn't got a heel a mile high stuck in the middle of the sole either, to make it look small."

The girl answered by a laugh and a grimace, and was gone.

"Look here," observed Denleigh. "That girl ought not to be allowed to be here."

"Which girl?"

"The one with the yellow hair," he replied, indicating the direction Madeline had taken. "It's a beastly shame for a girl like that to be brought here."

"You'd better go and marry her, and rescue her," suggested Springwood. "That would show you mean what you say. She ought not to belong to that Pelbois, I'll own: but if she joined our company, she's just the girl to raise the whole standard of the stage. What a Desdemona she'd make!"

"To your Othello, no doubt," sneered Winterfold.

"And why not?" retorted Springwood hotly.

"Well, really," said Jubal, "the conversation has taken a curious turn, considering she may not

be able to act at all ; and Springwood—well—there isn't much likeness between Bluebeard and Othello ; you do the one too well to do the other."

"Great actors can take all parts," said Springwood, in a theatrical tone.

"Together?" inquired Winterfold. "You'd better do Othello *and* Desdemona."

Springwood was about to make an angry retort, when Denleigh interrupted. "Don't get his temper up. Unaccredited genius is apt to be irritable. What a paragraph Scratch has lost by not being here!"

In the meantime the three who had given rise to this discussion had gone into Monsieur Pelbois' apartments, which were handsome enough. It had been arranged during the journey that the foreigner should prepare his wife to meet her visitors, in order to avoid shock. He, however, insisted on placing wine and biscuits on his drawing-room table for his visitors, before entering his wife's apartment, and this in spite of their repeated assertions that they could take nothing.

It seemed an age that Pelbois was absent. The

room he had entered was next to the one they were in: and the two stood together hand in hand, and vibrated in sympathy, as the tones of a voice familiar to both of them fell on their ears. There was an added something, too, in it, which neither of them could have described. It was that voice with a difference. It had been suggested that Madeline should go first and see her mother, and that she should break the news of her brother's being there to her. Therefore they were utterly unprepared for the wan apparition that now appeared in the doorway without warning, and framed itself there, looking, looking, not at Madeline, but at her brother; while her husband, standing behind her, kept making despairing signs to Mr. Rockingham and Madeline, setting forth as plainly as signs could, his utter inability to have prevented this. But as the gentle sister of former years stood there looking, every change in the dear face was burnt into her brother's heart and memory. Painful as it was to look, he did not remove his eyes from her. Her ghastliness showed itself the more for the paint on her face; and even the very attempts towards frustrating the

effects of time and sorrow, had a terrible pathos in them for the brother who had loved her through all these years.

For a long time, as it appeared, they stood so, neither advancing, neither speaking. It was not until the figure in the doorway began to sway gently, that the clergyman seemed to gain the power of moving. A single movement brought him to her side. His arms were round her, clutching her, gloating over her. A new life seemed to rise within her at the magnetic touch; for who cannot know whether love lives or is dead, if the hands meet? Where words and looks fail, contact asserts. A glad look came into her eyes. He was going to kiss her. She freed herself in a moment, and taking a handkerchief from the pocket of the dressing-gown she was wearing, she brushed the false bloom from the cheek he was to kiss, and offered it silently.

He kissed her as if he would never leave off, and half carrying her, seated her with him upon a couch. It would have been quite clear to anyone, that this unhappy woman was living in the moment and the moment only. She had not glanced one instant

forward since her eyes fell on her brother. She saw him and was with him. Could she take in more than that?

All this time Madeline stood apart, not daring to break in upon them. After some little time the clergyman remembered that this could not go on. He must make some arrangement quickly, to take his darling away, for away he meant to take her. So with this thought he said to her, "How soon can you put a dress on? We must go away."

She did not answer him. Her head still rested on his shoulder. He waited a few moments, and then put the question to her again. He was loath to disturb her, so he rested his own head against hers as it lay on his shoulder, and again waited. He started up. Madeline had given a shriek, and had flown towards them. He looked first at her, and then at the drooping head that lay against him.

"Bring some water; she's fainting," cried the clergyman to the husband, who was acting the part of a statue. He seized one of his sister's hands, and Madeline the other; and they rubbed them

between their own. But as they rubbed, the hands stiffened within them.

What a fate! that this should have come in the very hour of deliverance, at the apparent outset of a new and happy life. It seemed to poor Rockingham too cruel a blow that God had struck him. Yet his sister had had her dearest wish. She had died with her head pillowed on that bosom, and with his arm about her. And let us hope that a happier life than she had imagined was hers.





CHAPTER IX.

KEZIAH'S MAY-DAY.



EVER had a brighter May-day shone than the one that followed the tragedy we have described. Maud Towers and her friend Keziah, opened it by going out before breakfast. Maud wore a light-grey costume, with ribbons of a pale shade. Her widow's weeds were laid aside. Her feelings had gone against this. As she remarked to Keziah, she did not want to appear to the world with a label, "To Let," on her. But if Keziah would not leave off black unless she did, she must do it; though, she said, the cases were not at all parallel ones. Keziah, who looked best in pink, wore a print of that colour, and a white straw hat with pink ribbons. But her cheeks were sadly

wanting in pink. They were pale enough, though she had only just returned from Paris, whither Maud had spirited her away, after she had received Elworthy's letter. She had had a hard fight with death for her friend. Keziah seemed to have lost all wish to live. She had made no remark whatever about the letter, and her silence was the most frightful feature of all in Maud's eyes. It showed as nothing else could have done, how she had been hit. Maud had taken her to Paris, thinking that the utter change of scene might accomplish what she could not herself effect. Maud was angry with Elworthy, too, for the course he had taken ; and as her anger rose against him, it died out towards poor Keziah, who was equally blameworthy.

They had come back again now, and Keziah was able to speak of her miserable love affair ; and had gone so far as to wonder whether he would come back to her after all. It was a very good sign. Still Maud was just as far from knowing what would be the end of it, for she could not help thinking that, perhaps, Keziah had worn Elworthy's love out. But of this she said no word to her friend.

As they started out in the fresh morning, and passed down the garden, fragrant with hawthorn blossom, for it was already out in that sheltered nook, Maud said—

“ We will wear a breast-knot of this to-night.”

“ I wish you had not promised we would go,” said Keziah, wearily. “ It seems so unnatural to be meeting company one knows nothing about and cares less.”

“ Well, I have promised, at any rate ; and go we will. I’m not going to have you brooding and moping, all for want of a little effort on my part.”

“ But what do you expect going to a stupid party to do for me ? ”

“ I’ll answer that when you’ve been.” After all, it was something to have Keziah express an opinion at all. It was a vast improvement on her apathetic agreeing to everything, as she had done since Elworthy’s letter to her.

“ What are you thinking about ? ” asked Maud of Keziah, when they had walked along in silence for some time.

“ I was thinking how strange it is that Jubal is

to be married to-day, and that I should have no part in it of any kind."

"Well, you never expected to have any part in it."

"Oh, no; not for a long, long time. But ours does seem to be such an ill-assorted house."

"I think it's a great mistake for Jubal to marry," returned Maud. "He's too young to know his own mind."

"I'm afraid Laura won't make a good wife for anybody, either."

"The worst feature in the case is that she's coming to live next door to me," said Maud, irritably.

"That's your point of view, Maud. There is a worse. Poor Uncle David! Fancy his having her. It was a bad day for poor uncle when he took Jubal into his house. But look, Maud, what a bringing up he had. What can you expect?"

"You had the same, whatever it was."

"Well, he was a boy, and I suppose that made some difference. Besides, father never liked him; and I think he did like me at bottom."

“ He couldn’t help admiring you, Kizzy, whether he liked you or not. An outsider mightn’t take to you at once, nor admire you. You are too outspoken, perhaps, for that. But such a rare honesty as you have—certainly quite beyond anyone I ever knew—cannot but command respect and admiration from your worst enemies.”

Keziah shook her head sadly. “ Nothing is worth much except love,” she said. “ Opinions vary so ; and, at the best, they are but opinions. But love—it just takes you as you are, faults and all, and makes the best of you.” Then she reverted to the previous subject — Jubal’s marriage. “ To think that I should not have known he was going to be married to-day, but for uncle’s servants telling ours !” And, in spite of Maud’s efforts, the conversation kept in this vein during the whole of their walk ; and when they returned to breakfast, Keziah had no appetite, though she had been out, which distressed her friend a good deal. Their walk had been at so early an hour that the post did not come till breakfast was nearly over. It brought a letter from Gerald, which ran as follows :—

MY DEAR SISTER,—I never felt so fixed in my life. I don't know whom to be angry with. I would give anything to find someone to kick. Among them they have got Elworthy to fix the marriage-day. And I tell you he'll do it. He's working himself up till he'll be ill—I hope he will—before the day. That would give us time to look round again. What a fool he was! But there, a heart of stone might pity him, to see him. Have you no plan to suggest? There are so many sides to the question. Miss Beredith herself is so good a girl, and so unselfish—in fact, so true a woman in my opinion—I feel myself a brute to be planning and scheming what will be such a disaster in her eyes. It ought never to have come about at all. Oh, if people weren't such asses! I often think that it's all humbug when people talk about having gone in the dark, and so fallen into trouble. It seems to me there's more light in the world than these fools can bear, so they shut their eyes, and walk like that. I don't know whether you'd better tell *her* or not. I do wish you could suggest something, for I firmly believe—and mind you I'm not joking—that Elworthy will make short work of himself, if it comes to it.

Whatever was meant by the last observation, there the letter ended, unfinished, as if something had interrupted the writer.

Maud decided that she would show the letter to Keziah. She could not take the responsibility of keeping it from her.

Keziah took it all in, and then, without a single

comment upon it, but with a face full of some strong resolve, she said, "Come, let us see what we will wear this evening;" and assumed a gaiety of bearing which struck a cold chill to her friend's heart. She romped and played with Leonard in a manner which astonished the child not a little, as he had come to think her rather dull. She ran races with him in the garden, and pelted him with daisies. On the whole, Maud thought Keziah was going out of her mind. At last, when she stopped, flushed from her running, Maud said to her, "I wouldn't do so if I were you, Kizzy; people will think—well, I hardly know what they will think."

"That I am out of my mind, I suppose," replied Keziah. "Do not be frightened, Maud. I have been mad, but I am sane enough now. I have been mad," she repeated. "It's quite true; but it is gone."

Maud doubted it. She hoped within herself that Keziah's gaiety would take another turn before the evening, and that she would not make herself remarkable at the Denleighs'.

Keziah's gaiety did keep up, however; and she

dressed herself with the greatest care, and seemed to be taking pleasure in it.

When Mrs. Towers and Mrs. Hackbit were ushered into the drawing-room at the Denleigh manor-house that evening, the colonel was lounging in an easy chair near one end, in the enjoyment of all the privileges of an invalid. The room, though large, was well filled with guests. Keziah had not expected to see so many people.

Mrs. Denleigh met them, graciously extended the tips of her fingers, and led them to her husband—a formality all guests went through. He, with his eyeglass up, surveyed the two girls critically, and seemed mightily pleased with Keziah's appearance, though for Maud he had not a second look. He begged Keziah, rather in a commanding tone, which he had brought with him from India, and preserved more carefully than anything else he had brought, to indulge an invalid, and sit down and talk to him. Keziah could but obey; so she seated herself on an ottoman, while Maud was carried off by the hostess, and Keziah soon saw her in conversation with a tall young gentle-

man, whom she believed she had seen somewhere : it was Winterfold.

The colonel, noticing the direction Keziah's eyes had taken, began to discuss the young gentleman with some asperity and a candour extraordinary from a stranger to a stranger. He had developed a habit, in the years since he had been an invalid, of talking in the most familiar way with any girl who took his fancy, just as if he had always known her, and she knew all his affairs. He did this, it must be owned, chiefly to annoy his wife, which was his only relish in life now, except these same talks with pretty strangers. So he ran on in his usual style.

Keziah said nothing in reply. She could not help noticing that Mrs. Denleigh was casting annoyed glances in their direction. As for Winterfold, a short time ago he would have given anything to be talking to the girl who was now beside him, while at present he cared nothing at all about it. He had seen Madeline since then. So Maud was but ill-entertained, and looked somewhat bored.

"Your friend is not enjoying herself," remarked the colonel. "I will find someone to amuse her ;

that is, Mrs. Denleigh shall. There's the oddest little man here—you can't see him now, because he's hidden in that group of tall ladies—well, he's the drollest and oddest man I ever met with. He has only been here once before, and that was with some young relative of his, who is a friend of my nephew's. He'd make anybody laugh."

"Would he?" said Keziah, with failing interest.

"He's quite rough in his manners, and altogether uneducated. It was Allan who would have him invited. Mrs. Denleigh objected as a matter of course, especially after he had been here, and she had seen what he was like. But, you see, I had never been so amused for years, so I insisted that he should be invited again. For," he added in a lower tone, "I can't afford to throw away any amusement now. You can have no idea how dull it is here from week's end to week's end. This droll man is quite a godsend. He looks like a fish out of water in a dress suit. I do wish these ladies would move away, so that you could see him. The first time he came he was destitute of h's, but now he has too many, and he takes everything *au grand*

sérieux. I got him to sit by me, and drew him—slang term, my dear, but you will understand. It was wonderfully easy work. He told me all about himself, where he was born, and everything he had done, I should think. Look, you can see him now.”

Keziah could see him, and recognised her uncle. “Oh,” she cried instantaneously, rising from her seat, with fury in her face, “you hypocritical, detestable man, how I despise you !”

He looked astounded.

“The gentleman you have been insulting and making game of—for a gentleman he is, whatever his birth or bringing up—just as you are no gentleman, whatever your birth or your bringing up—is my uncle ; and I shall go directly and tell him how you have been making game of him, and we will leave your house together.”

The colonel stammered out a profuse apology. He was stunned by the idea that this beautiful girl in the pale pink dress could possibly belong to the blundering man who had been the unconscious butt of his jokes.

All eyes were drawn to Keziah as she marched

across the room to her uncle. She flung her arms around his neck before the whole assembly. "Come away, uncle," she cried, "and never enter this house again. They do nothing but make game of you, and insult you behind your back."

The lady of the house, deadly white, but stern and cold as marble, remarked icily, "This sort of thing is to be expected, if we invite persons of the class Mr. Rimmon belongs to. I told the colonel so."

Maud had come up to Keziah while she spoke. She was aghast at what had occurred. She felt humiliated, in that it was her friend who was making this scene, when another course might have been adopted without loss of dignity, and yet without loss of effect. But however painful she felt her own position to be, she had no thought of not taking Keziah's part; so she said to Mrs. Denleigh, who was close to her—

"Mrs. Hackbit must have had very grave provocation, to cause her to lose her self-possession in this way;" and with a bow she passed on after David and Keziah, who were leaving the room.

The carriage in which the girls had come had not been ordered to return till a late hour; so they started on foot. David was thoroughly frightened. Keziah was alternately hurling epithets at the colonel and caressing her uncle. "I couldn't imagine who it could be he was talking about," she said, "until all at once he pointed you out. How did you come to know them, uncle?"

"They are friends of Jubal's," replied poor David, in trembling tones.

"And how is it you are not at Jubal's wedding?" asked Keziah.

"Jubal thought it would be best if I were not there."

"Jubal! Jubal! It's always Jubal," said Keziah. "Why do you always do what Jubal asks you?"

Maud was silently walking on the other side of Keziah. She felt the situation to be an extremely awkward one, for obvious reasons; and would have given anything if she and Keziah had not gone to that party. What a scandal it would create, she thought!

Keziah was very little troubled about any scandal. She felt that, however things looked for her, the position of the colonel and his family was much worse. They would get worse thought of than she would, no doubt. Keziah felt glad she had spoken in the hearing of every one of the party.

When they reached The Chestnuts, Keziah said, "I will go in with my uncle a short time, if you don't mind, Maud." David would not ask Maud to come in, so she went into her own house, while Keziah and her uncle were left alone.

A fire was burning in the dining-room when they entered, and Keziah sat down on a low chair before it, and flung off her cloak, which had been her only covering during that walk home. David sat down on the tails of his dress-coat, and looked at her with a pained expression that half broke her heart. "Oh, uncle," she exclaimed desperately, "how hard it is that people like you and me"—she coupled herself definitely with him—"should have such a hard fight with caste."

David did not take in the full meaning of what she said. He was thinking within himself, over and

over again, as if a tune were running in his head, "They had me there to make game of me."

When he did speak to Keziah, he said, "Kizzy, did I, do I look very ridiculous?"

"Ridiculous," replied Keziah, bristling. "You look ridiculous! When did you ever look that? Is it ridiculous to look honest, and talk honestly, and to expect fair dealing? That is all you looked, or ever look."

"I'm afraid you are mistaken, Kizzy," said her uncle; and he shook his head from side to side sadly. "I never had a headpiece."

"It wants a headpiece, as you said," replied Keziah, "to tell all the lies required of you by society, and to sift out the small portion of truth that comes in the lies they tell you. They appear to me to be asking questions they never mean you to answer, give you invitations they never mean you to accept, smile at you when they're ever so angry, and look serious when they're laughing at you. That's what I think society is."

David looked uneasy. "Don't you think, Kizzy," he said, hesitatingly, "that it might have

been just a little better to have come away, and never gone there any more, without having said what you did ? ”

“ Perhaps it would,” Keziah admitted. “ But I never did, and never shall, I suppose, think of the right thing at the right moment. But I want to ask you about Jubal. How was it you consented to let him marry so soon ? Has he done much in the business to justify his marrying ? ”

“ I don’t want to be hard upon Jubal,” said his uncle. “ I thought it would have been different. I think no man can be a good manufacturer who has not worked up from the beginning, so as to understand every part.”

“ And Jubal has not done so ? ”

“ No ; I fear he has become rather wild. He had been so harshly treated at home that I did not like to treat him harshly too. I have been trying kindness.”

Keziah couldn’t help smiling at the idea of David treating anybody harshly.

“ When are they coming here ? ”

“ Not for a long time. They are going to France

and Italy. It's a very quiet wedding," went on David, meditatively; "nobody is invited, I believe."

"But now, uncle David, I want to ask you to do me a favour. If I want to go somewhere, all in a hurry, will you go with me? Will you manage it somehow?"

"You know I will do anything for you."

"Then I shall count on you," said Keziah, rising.

Before Keziah had got out of the house, the old tune was ringing in his head, to the exclusion of all else—"They had me there to make game of me."

It may, perhaps, be imagined by some, that the party Keziah and her friends quitted in such a manner was left in a state of confusion and bewilderment. By no means. The doors once closed, the men smiled, the women shrugged their shoulders slightly, and all went on as if nothing had occurred. A girl who had, so it appeared, risen from the lower classes, had acted very rudely, that was all. It would be a lesson not to mix with that class of persons.





CHAPTER X.

JOSHUA'S JOKE.



BEFORE Hackbit died," Mr. Rimpler observed to Mr. Rimmon, one day when they were alone together, "he had almost resolved, I believe, to found a family, and if he had kept away from drink, he could have done it. Now, you don't drink."

"No, I don't drink," echoed Joshua, looking in an expressionless way at Rimpler, and wondering what he was driving at.

"Well, don't you know by this time," went on Mr. Rimpler, "that money can do any mortal thing? Some fools accumulate their money till they're up to the neck in it; and they die, and it all goes to some one else. My theory is, the man's a fool who

does that. Let me have enough money at my back to last me out as many years as I can live, and I'll answer for it, the day I die shall see the last half-penny spent, if it had to be for a soft pillow, bought at the last moment, to die on. Now, you can form a fair estimate of how long you've to live; and you know, and I know, that you could live like a lord for the remainder of your days. Gold attracts gold as surely as a magnet does a needle. Without any humbug, you're a very rich man. Then why not live like one, and enjoy yourself? And," said he, with a smile with a good deal of fun in it, "you can build a chapel if you like; that will keep up appearances. They'll make you a magistrate, and return you to Parliament yet."

Joshua smiled with pleasure, as these visions of his own greatness and importance were shown to him. "What do you advise me to do?" he said. "I like your chapel idea." And inwardly he thought that he would be making amends, if he built a chapel with his ill-gotten gains. Then it occurred to him that it seemed an awful thing to be putting that money for such a purpose; and the thought was

so strong upon him after it had once come into his mind, that he couldn't help saying something about it to Rimpler.

"Do you think such a thing might bring a curse with it?"

"As to that," remarked Rimpler, with a dry laugh, "it's a sort of thing I don't consider, in any way. But if you do, you can put the speculation money to that use, instead of the other."

"It doesn't really seem," Mr. Rimmon said solemnly, "as if God were angry with me after all, or else how is it all my speculations have succeeded so well? Look at the times I have doubled the money I have put in at a stroke."

"Now's the time to drop speculating," rejoined Rimpler, ignoring the former part of the sentence. "Leave off with your pocket full, or you may find your fortune change all of a sudden, and then where are you?"

"Well," returned Mr. Rimmon, "it shall be out of the speculation money. I'll build the grandest chapel in the Connexion, and we'll arrange about buying the ground at once. I should like to buy

that piece of ground opposite to the church, so that my chapel shall stare that out of countenance."

"You can get it, no doubt," said Rimpler. "You see you can offer anything you like for it."

"I will make inquiries about it at once."

"But that is the minor concern after all," resumed Rimpler. "You must build yourself a house; a mansion, sir, a mansion."

Mr. Rimmon stared in amazement.

"Yes, why not," said Rimpler, "in the very heart of the neighbourhood you were born in?"

Mr. Rimmon had never thought of this.

"If I build a house," went on Mr. Rimmon grandly, rising to the occasion, "it shall be such a house as there's not for miles round. I have in my mind's eye a picture of what it should be."

"It's been built up pretty quick then," said Rimpler. "What's it like?"

"I went on business when I was a young man," replied Mr. Rimmon, as if imparting a valuable piece of information, "to a gentleman's country-seat; and I sat in the hall waiting, ever so long."

“Dear me,” remarked Mr. Rimpler, “what a privilege!”

Mr. Rimmon, with his eyes fixed on the distant picture, continued, “The hall was panelled in wood, and was covered with all sorts of mottoes. I shall have my hall panelled in wood, and covered with mottoes; and they shall all be in foreign languages, like those were.”

“How very elevating,” said Mr. Rimpler, “but not a bad idea. Shall I choose the mottoes?”

“No, thank you,” responded Mr. Rimmon solemnly. “I shall choose them out of the dictionary. There are plenty of them at the end of the dictionary. And some of them must be done in foreign letters. Those were. I couldn’t read one of them. I asked a footman what they were; and he said they were Greek and German. I shall have Greek and German.”

Mr. Rimpler burst into a laugh. “Do you mean to set up for a scholar as well as a grandee? You’d better copy all your mottoes into a pocket book, and learn them off, or else you’ll get stumped when someone asks you what they are.”

“ We will go up to London, Rimpler, and buy the furniture. I shall buy the best there is to be had, and give the best price.”

“ Before the house is built ? ”

Mr. Rimmon deigned to give no reply, but went on, “ Let us get this thing done quickly, Rimpler ; I should like to feel what it's like before I die. Hack-bit should have been quicker.”

“ Well, m'm,” remarked Sarah to her mistress, about eleven o'clock one May morning, fanning her hot face with her apron, “ this is what I call something like. It's worth while cleaning up when everything's to look so spruce and new. I'm sure that old furniture wasn't worth the beeswaxing. The more it shined, the uglier it seemed to look ; and it seemed to give it a brassy look like, as if it would make you look at it, when it was shining like looking-glass ; and just to think of it all going to a auction, just as I'd beeswaxed it, for all them dealers to mess and maul. And I'm sure this furniture looks most beautiful—leastways I never saw nothink like it.”

Mrs. Rimmon heartily coincided in these remarks, for the furniture was of the newest and most fashionable. From the time Rimpler had fired his brain, by picturing to him what his money could do for him, Joshua had been plunging and snorting in the harness of a dingy house, dingy furniture, and a shabby wife. The latter he consequently took especial pleasure in snubbing and frightening. To this end he went down to the auction rooms in Jumley and ordered the men to fetch away his furniture on a certain day, without warning his wife, having previously been to London and made purchases, which were to arrive on the day of removal, at a late hour.

So it fell out that Mrs. Rimmon was in the act of laboriously darning a hole at the corner of one of the horsehair chairs, when Sarah announced in appalling accents that a lot of men had "come for the furniture," they said.

"What furniture?" asked Mrs. Rimmon.

One of the men, after the manner of the Black Country, had followed the maid, and now advancing, said—

"We've horders to move heverything."

"There must be some mistake," Mrs. Rimmon replied, in her own mind dreading lest by some unaccountable means they had been suddenly ruined.

The man pushed a paper towards her. "This is the horder," he said.

Mrs. Rimmon could not read, but she knew her husband's writing.

"But can't you wait till he comes home?" inquired Mrs. Rimmon.

"Hour horders hare to move the things. ('ome hon, mates," he added; "the sale's to come hoff at one o'clock, and not a gimerack of hall this can be catalogued. It'll have to be sold at the lag end. Plenty o' worms in this, ain't there, mum?" he added, pointing to a mark in the table.

Mrs. Rimmon made no reply, but stared helplessly, as the men began to remove the goods. She and Sarah followed them from one apartment to another mechanically, and saw one thing after another carried out.

The stair carpets were up, and rolled, and then the men went upstairs, followed by Sarah and Mrs.

Rimmon. The first room they entered was that which had been Jubal's.

"You can chuck that rubbish through the window, and some one can catch it," observed one of the men, eying the things satirically; "or stop, you can put it all in your trouser pocket."

He then produced a set of bed keys, and commenced to take to pieces the bed on which Jubal had passed many a sleepless night.

That room was soon finished off, so was Keziah's. In Sarah's the three men stood and laughed at the box which did duty for a washstand and dressing-table, in consequence of Mr. Rimmon having refused to supply any proper accommodation of that sort.

The last room they entered was the spare bedroom. The bedstead in this room was of a ponderous description, and required a considerable amount of taking down. It happened that the first two waggons passed down the High Street of Jumley before this was completed. As they passed with their freight, Miss Dorcas Rimmon was in the act of displaying her latest millinery triumph in her

window : and she, hearing a considerable rumble, looked out just as they were passing. Her astonishment may be imagined. Joshua's furniture could not be mistaken. What could this mean ?

In a wild state of alarm Miss Dorcas sallied forth, in a space of time so small that it did her great credit. Portions of the ponderous bedstead were being carried downstairs when she put in an appearance at the house of Rimmon. She had previously looked through the windows from the outside—an easy matter in their present bare state.

“ Ann,” she cried, at the top of her parrot-like voice, “ where are you ? Come directly, and tell me what it all means.”

The men who were carrying the portions of bedstead downstairs appeared to be much amused. What she said could have very little in it to provoke merriment ; it must have been the tone.

Mrs. Rimmon was in the spare bedroom ; and the way was blocked by other massive portions of bedstead. She made her way, however, past the men, and showed herself on the other side of the barrier of goods.

“What’s the meaning of this, Ann?” asked Miss Dorcas from the other side of the barrier.

“I’m sure I know nothing about it,” replied Mrs. Rimmon, beginning to cry. “I suppose it’s Joshua’s doings.”

“Perhaps he’s agoin’ to Hostralia,” suggested one of the men. This suggestion threw poor Mrs. Rimmon into such a paroxysm of terror that she was speechless. Besides, it appeared really to be a most natural outcome of the selling-off of everything, even the beds from under them. Dorcas, who was pretty proof herself against sudden fear, could not help thinking there might be truth in the man’s suggestion. It flashed into her mind that he might be about to depart in disgrace, due in some way to those lost papers she had had to do with; so she was unusually silent while the remainder of the things were removed. At length the house was shorn of everything except the cooking utensils, which the men said were “honitted in the horder, likewise the kitchen table and chairs,” the former of which they declared gratis would “perhaps sell as hold hiron, the latter as firewood.” And when

the men had finally departed, and Sarah in a kind of desperation, produced potatoes, and began to peel them savagely, Dorcas said to her sister-in-law, in the tone of an executioner, "You're ruined! It's his villainy. It's all along o' that. And I believe that snake in the grass Rimpler is at the bottom of it. He was always ferretin' among his affairs."

Mrs. Rimmon cast frightened glances at Sarah, who was cutting away at the potatoes, to the great sacrifice of the eatable portions. Sarah observed the look.

"Don't mind me, missis," said the faithful girl. "If I hadn't known how to keep my mouth shut, I should never ha' been here now."

"Then keep your mouth shut, as you're so much practised in it," said Dorcas.

"Thank you, miss, and the same to you," retorted Sarah, with a comical dignity, curtsying, knife and potato in hand, "though you mayn't be as practised in it as me, or master's affairs mightn't be as public as they seem to be."

"Where is Joshua?" inquired Dorcas of her sister-in-law.

"I don't know. I never do know," replied Mrs. Rimmon. "I wish he'd come home now. I haven't wished that this many a day."

Mrs. Rimmon in her trouble forgot herself so far as to make this latter remark, and was soon made aware of the fact.

"You're a pattern wife, you are, to say that," Miss Dorcas began. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself—and before the servant too. If you'd been a better wife, it might never have come to this."

"I'm sure I've done my best," said Mrs. Rimmon; "and it does seem hard to be dragged off to Australia to end my days in a foreign land, that it does. I did think to lay my bones where I've been born and bred. I'm sure they'd never rest in foreign earth, with foreign flowers a-growin' on it, and foreign feet a-treadin' over it."

"Don't you alarm yourself," replied Miss Dorcas spitefully. "If Joshua is going, as I think he is, it's more than likely he's on the way. Do you think he'd want to take a thing like you with him?"

Mrs. Rimmon looked as if all this coming sud-

denly upon her would prove too much for her feeble brain. But the faithful Sarah answered Miss Dorcas for her.

“Don’t you trouble yourself to make more harm than there is,” she said. “If so be that the missis is left, which I don’t believe because you say it, she won’t be a-wantin’ for a home, because I’ve got hands. I haven’t stood by her all these years, to go away at the last when she wants me the worst.” And she pushed the pot of potatoes on to the fire, and then asked, in a tone anything but cordial, if Miss Dorcas were going to stay to dinner, “because,” she said, “there’s nothing but bacon, and it isn’t very lean.”

“I’m going to stay to see my brother, if he comes,” she replied; “and I don’t want any dinner.”

“There’ll be all the more left for them as do, then,” said Sarah, angrily unhooking a portion of bacon from the ceiling, and cutting savagely into it.

Mrs. Rimmon sat in silence, and watched her fry the bacon and steam the potatoes, and sighed deeply from time to time. But though Sarah put

the meal as temptingly as she could before her mistress, she could eat nothing; she was much too wretched for that.

Finding Mrs. Rimmon could not touch her dinner, Sarah made some tea for her, and went to the hens' nest and got a new-laid egg and boiled it. But this was equally unsuccessful. If Mrs. Rimmon would not eat, at the least poor puss must have her dinner; so Sarah called her. But puss, who usually came so readily, did not put in an appearance.

"Where can the cat be? Oh, save us all," cried Sarah, as if suddenly recollecting something, "if those men haven't been and took the old cupboard as stood in the passage out there, and the old cat was in it, and her new kittens. I'll go down to that sale-room directly. Poor thing!" And she put on her bonnet and shawl, and rushed off, pinning the shawl as she went.

When Sarah was gone, Miss Dorcas informed Mrs. Rimmon that those papers Joshua had lost were at the bottom of this, and managed to make her arrive at the very verge of insanity by the horrors she depicted as the outcome of it all.

It was about three o'clock when Sarah returned in possession of the poor cat and three kittens.

"Them men was brutes, and I told 'em so," she broke out. "They was a settin' of her up for auction, they was, and 'er a spittin' like mad. Poor pussy," she added, stroking the adventurer.

Half-past four is the usual Black Country tea-time; and at that hour tea was ready. Miss Dorcas had sat on, for in her own mind she believed Joshua would turn up; and she was not destined to be disappointed. That gentleman did turn up, just at that time; and his features did relax into a smile at sight of the desolate picture that met his eye as he entered by the back way.

"Oh, Joshua, Joshua!" cried Mrs. Rimmon, rising from her seat, "why didn't you tell me that we were ruined?"

"You bestir yourselves, and help these men to bring in these things," was the reply.

The words were meaningless till Mrs. Rimmon saw with her own eyes packages passing the window, unmistakably furniture.

"Oh, missis," exclaimed Sarah, clapping her

hands, "it's such a beautiful shape, and we're goin' to new furnish, that's it;" and she set to work with a will, to render all the assistance in her power, while her mistress, not less appalled by the arrival of the new furniture than she had been by the departure of the old, stood where she was, and watched the men struggle in under their heavy weights.

"They're not Jumley men at all," said Sarah, explanatorily; "they've come from London, and they're goin' to put the carpets down as they've brought."

Miss Dorcas roused herself to say, in a stately manner, "I saw through it all the time, Ann." After this speech she said she should just go home now, and come up to-morrow to see how things looked, when they were a bit straight.

By midnight the house of Rimmon had undergone a veritable transformation. The household did not, however, retire to rest till much later; there was too much to admire. Mr. Rimmon was actually on tolerably friendly terms with his wife, except for an occasional snub. He had had his joke, and it had

succeeded admirably; and he had not explained it to her.

Before the next day was over, Mr. Rimmon actually forgot himself so far as to enlighten his wife on the subject of the prospective palatial residence: and it would be difficult to decide which pleased her most, the idea of the glory to come, or the fact that her lord had actually volunteered the information.





CHAPTER XI.

THE PAINS OF FREEDOM.



FTER her mother's death and burial, Madeline returned to Mrs. Saltring's, without any resistance on her father's part. It was agreed between her uncle and herself that she should not part suddenly from those who had befriended her in her sore need. Moreover, they determined not to be precipitate in letting the events which had occurred become known to their relatives, for Mr. Rockingham well knew that nothing short of the most dexterous action would ensure for his niece any recognition by them. Besides the Saltrings, only one family was admitted into confidence, namely, the Towers; and that came about in this way.

Mr. Rockingham had resolved to make inquiries as to the places Pelbois had visited when he had come to Langton; and fortune so far favoured him that it was of Jody Waddy he chanced to inquire first.

Early in the morning after his return from Manchester, he looked first on the church steps for Jody, who was indeed there, smoking his little dirty pipe. He touched his hat as the clergyman approached, and then waited for Mr. Rockingham to address him.

"Have you seen a strange foreign-looking gentleman about here anywhere?" Mr. Rockingham asked.

"An' if I haven't," responded Jody, solemnly looking upwards, "may the Lord——"

"It's not worth swearing about, Jody," put in the clergyman. "It's a plain question, and requires only a plain answer."

"Well, then," resumed Jody, in a tone which implied that he was quite ready to give the plain answer required, but that he perhaps took the word in a wrong sense, "he wor the darnedest furriner as

ever stepped mortal earth, and he'd got the darnedest tongue——”

“That isn't quite what I meant,” explained Mr. Rockingham. “Do you happen to know whom he came to see?”

“It might ha' been me,” replied Jody, shaking his shaggy head, “by the way as he called me ‘my friend,’ when he ought to ha' knowed, too, as I'd rather be friends with a polecat, or my missis yonder, than 'im. I've never been well sin' he wor here, and I'm feared as he wished me ill.”

“Well, well,” said Mr. Rockingham, growing impatient under this tirade, for he felt sure he referred to Pelbois, as in a place like Langton a foreigner was so rare a visitor. “What was he like?”

“I don't know,” answered Jody. “I couldn't abide to look at 'im. He looked black enough, I know that; an' he pulled a hat over his face, he did; an' he asked me to show 'im the way to Doctor Towers's, an' then had the face to grumble at the road. An', O Lord, don't I wish I had the buryin' of 'im; he wor the aggravatifest furriner——”

Jody, to his utter surprise, found himself left at this point by the clergyman. He looked after him as he disappeared down the road, with a fixed eye of disapproval.

“Oh!” he exclaimed, “I thought he wanted to know about it, but it’s like ’em all—they all leave me to talk to the ghosteses. I ain’t sure the ghosteses ain’t better to talk to; they don’t snap a man’s nose off, in a-answerin’ of ’em, the ghosteses don’t. Old Betty might, but she ain’t a right and proper ghost, to my mind; an’ she couldn’t walk for a good while afore she died, so I don’t suppose ’er ghost can walk.” And the old man filled his dirty little pipe again. It was a habit of his to haul about a spade, as another man might have done a stick, as a mark of office. He had got his spade now. He only knew one song, and that was appropriate to his office: and between his puffs he sang it now, though he hadn’t the faintest notion of keeping in tune, and had considerably mutilated the words, in years of repetition. The refrain he liked best was—

I’ve buried ’em deep an’ my duty I’ve done;
and one line, referring to the numbers the grave-

digger of the song had buried, always brought to his face an individual smirk. Once in singing this song at the Bull's Head, when a little the worse for drink, he had remarked to one of his companions—no, not companions, for he had none—but to one of those seated beside the same fire with himself at that time, “If there'd only come a pestilence, as they talk of in the church, an' I could 'ave the buryin' of 'em, I believe I wouldn't mind dyin' at the end of it myself. When I know as I've buried more than any other sexton, my duty I'll have done.”

Mr. Rockingham was far out of reach of the song, for rapid strides had carried him to the corner house, inhabited by the doctor and his family. Doctor Towers had always had a friendly feeling for Mr. Rockingham, because he had never taken advantage of his priesthood to inquire into private affairs; so he was always welcome when he called.

The tiny sitting-room was empty when Mr. Rockingham entered it, and sat down on one of the chintz-covered chairs, and looked down the street through the small window.

The doctor was just starting out on his first

round, but he came at once to Mr. Rockingham.

“You are just going out, I fear,” he began, “and what I have come about cannot be put in a nutshell. Had I not better walk with you?”

“If you don’t mind,” said the doctor, “I should be very glad if you would, as there are some patients I ought to see early. There’s a good deal of sickness about.”

The clergyman took his hat and put it on, as the sign that he was ready; and he and the doctor passed out of the door, and had soon left the straggling village behind.

“I hope you will not think,” began the clergyman, with some diffidence, “that what I am going to say is undue interference with your affairs. If you will have the patience to hear me, you will see that at any rate. I am as deeply implicated as any one can be in the affair of which I am going to speak, and my only motive is to liberate you, if possible, from what must be, if my surmises are correct, a most bitter bond. A man who has caused me the bitterest trouble my life has known is, I find, also connected with your house.”

The doctor's great chest heaved, and his piercing eyes caught all the expression of the clergyman's face as he spoke.

"The name of your married sister is the same as that of the man I have alluded to. I have traced the man to your house."

The doctor's face became very pale.

"Will you tell me in the same friendly spirit in which I ask, if that man ever professed to marry your sister?"

"He did marry her," replied the doctor hoarsely.

"Can you give me the date?"

"It was February, 18—."

"You are sure of that?"

"I have reason enough to be sure."

"Then," said the clergyman, "I am, indeed, a messenger of good to you."

"How can you be?"

"He is not your sister's husband."

"Explain yourself."

"He married my sister before that date."

The doctor stood still in the road. The clergy-

man also stopped. The two men looked at each other, a new meaning in each face. What a bond there is in a common sorrow ! That interchanged look made these two men brothers.

“ Strange, passing strange ! ” said Towers. “ How can I rejoice in your presence ? I feel as if you had taken my place in a prison-cell. All the rest is small,” he added, thinking of his sister, “ compared with her bearing his name and being his wife. That he has betrayed, ruined her, seems nothing to it. At least she is still mine, and need never trouble herself about him again.”

“ How you must have suffered,” responded the clergyman sadly, “ to have learnt your lesson so well ! I too have had to learn that the case is less wretched when a beloved one is cheated and ruined by a bad man, than when he has the right to call her his property, and bid her go and come, and none are able to help or forbid. When I saw Pelbois he told me he had been somewhere after money. Have you indeed been paying him to leave to you what was not his to claim ? ”

“ That is the whole story.”

“Then it is over, and I have been a messenger of good after all.”

“You have indeed; you have removed the shadow that covered our house. Death removed one; you have removed the other. If things like this happen to me, I shall believe there is a God of mercy after all.”

The clergyman did not begin, as some very young curates would have done, to attempt to prove to this man of science the existence of a God of mercy. Mr. Rockingham confined his preaching to the pulpit; moreover, he was far-sighted enough to see that Dr. Towers was taking a lesson from a Greater Teacher at that moment, for he had given one little glance upward, and his eyes were swimming with tears.

They walked on a little farther, and the doctor said, “You have been so very kind to me, and made yourself so close a friend by what you have done, that it cannot be wrong in me to ask you if your sister is beyond the reach of that man.”

“She is beyond the reach of that man, beyond the reach of everyone. Man could not free her, so

God did it ;” and he added, as if determined to be thoroughly frank with this man, whom he had respected all along, and now felt a strong affection for, by reason of their common silent suffering—

“ My sister had a daughter. She is with me. So God has not left me entirely desolate.”

The doctor looked inquiringly.

“ You must guess it already. Madeline is my niece ; but I do not wish it to be known at present. I must break it carefully to my family. I would not have Madeline suffer injustice at their hands. She must not go to them or be known to them unless in her rightful position.”

“ Pride is a hard dictator at times,” remarked Dr. Towers, with a sigh.

“ That is true,” replied the vicar, “ and my family I have found as hard as ever, even when I took my poor darling’s remains to their resting-place in the family vault. But I have a plan in my head that shall right Madeline, and until then, she shall remain at Mrs. Saltring’s as before, which she is very willing to do.”

More might have been said, but the doctor’s time

was of importance, and they were at the gate of the house he was to visit first.

Dr. Towers was so light-hearted when he entered his patient's room, so very chatty, that the very sight of him produced a good effect; and when he had left that house, and was once more in a country-lane, he found himself unwontedly singing. So does sudden freedom from a long-borne and terrible burden bring to the physically strong a renewed vigour of spirit which is rejuvenescence. Towers saw before him in the lane two or three little boys, truants from school, throwing stones at a tin can on a gate post. He remembered so well the days when "shying" at an object had been his idea of bliss, especially in school hours, that he sympathised with the little scapegraces, and stood still to watch their success, and applaud; and finally he distributed half-pence among the young rascals, who doubtless deserved a whipping instead. He went on his way with such a light tread and such a singing heart that he could hardly recognise himself. His long lane had had a turning, and had led him into rich meadows, ease and plenty. A miracle had been

performed. Happiness would be restored to his home; and he could make it a home now. There would be no drag upon his purse. And as everything smiled around him and within him, a sudden check, from whence he could not have told, put a momentary stop to his delirium of happiness: and a feeling of shame crept over him. Why had he believed himself God-forsaken, when all the time this God was caring for him, and providing a means of escape? An overwhelming feeling of humility took possession of him; his whole nature thawed; and hidden away as he was from mortal gaze, he wept aloud. This was succeeded by a happier frame than ever, though not quite so overflowing; and he hurried on to his next patient, and through all his morning's round as if work were no work. Then when at last he was at liberty to return home to his usual early dinner, he made some purchases of special dainties in the village, out of their reach hitherto, and sent them on before him to herald the approach of better fortune.

Miss Towers took in the basket herself when it arrived, and called her sister's attention to it.

“What can be the meaning of his spending all this money?” said Madame Pelbois, as we shall continue to call her. “These things must be so expensive. It’s so early in the season.”

“I tell you what it is,” said Amy, putting her thin hands together tightly; “we are somehow in luck.”

“Very much so, indeed,” said Dr. Towers, coming upon them. “We shall be hereafter as other people, peaceful and unmolested. Isn’t that something?”

The two poor ladies looked almost scared. What could they think? He took each by an arm, and led them into the little sitting-room, and closed the door.

“Girls,” he said—it had been years since he had used that term—“I declare for the first time this room does seem to be horribly small and inconvenient.”

His sisters dared not speak. They were almost afraid of this mood of his. The doctor was only amused by the fear in their faces, and tantalisingly went on, holding bad news as it were high above their heads.

“What do you say to the gabled white house, Amy?”

“The gabled white house! Mr. Richardson’s house!”

“Not Mr. Richardson’s now,” said the doctor, his face smiling all over. “Don’t you think it would suit us?”

“Why do you talk of such things,” answered Louisa deprecatingly, “when you know they are quite out of our reach?”

“Out of our reach they were,” replied the doctor, “so long as other people spent our money for us; but not so if our income were our own. We have never been short of income; but others have spent it for us; that has been it: and that is all ended.”

“He is dead!” exclaimed Madame Pelbois, with a gasp. “Then he is dead!”

“Dead to you, my Louisa, for ever and ever,” said the doctor, taking her face, so thin and careworn, between his two large hands. “He is dead to you. He is to you as if he had never lived. You have had a bad dream, that is all. None of it has

ever been," he went on, looking with glowing eyes at the pale face he held. "We must all believe that."

"Tell us what you have heard, at once," insisted Amy. "You have heard something; tell us the meaning of it all."

"My love," said the doctor, "there is nothing to tell but this. Louie is our own, very own sister, just as if she had never gone away; no one else has any right over her. There is no more to tell than that. He has been a villain to you, Louie; but it is all over. He has no right over you; he never had. He never dare trouble us again. He was a married man at the very time——" He did not finish his sentence, and it was not needed. It was all understood now.

Perhaps the doctor would not have looked so disappointed when Louisa showed no sign of pleasure, had he weighed more carefully the difference between his position and hers. He had looked for a wild outburst of joy from both his sisters at the news he had communicated; and it was received in dead silence. The doctor had not made allowance enough for the physical and mental

degeneration which comes so often to women who sit at home and suffer, while the happier men go forth to work. They had not the power left in them to suddenly rejoice at anything; but they had that innate fear and suspicion that come of such experience; and could not allow their minds to trust that they had at last sure ground beneath their feet. When the doctor saw the cold and apathetic way in which they received the news, his heart sank into a depression for the time being, as deep as that which had been his for years until that morning. In his depression he began to ask himself whether the news he had heard was true, whether he had been too hasty, whether, in fact, their trouble was over; and he felt that nothing could remove this torture of mind but some positive proof. So with a kind of prophetic impulse, he said to his sisters, "You don't realise it. I will fetch you proof;" and went out. As he spoke the words they were echoed back to him as if some one else had spoken them; and a great courage welled up within him. He was not going to seek proof; he was going to fetch it; and naturally enough his feet took him into the vicarage.

He was not long there ; and when he came out with, if anything, a more buoyant look on his face than he had worn in the morning, our worthy sexton accosted him with—

“ Has a fever broke out, Doctor Towers ? ”

“ Not that I know of,” answered the doctor, not wishing to be interrupted.

“ O Lord,” said Jody, disconsolately, “ I thought there wor ; you look so jolly glad. And,” he added, explanatorily, “ other folks’s trouble’s yours and my blessin’, ain’t it, doctor ? Folks die so as we can live, don’t they ? ”

“ I don’t get my living by killing people,” responded the doctor snappishly, and walked on, with his hand pressed against his side, where his pocket was, as if he had a pain in it. He banged open his door, to the serious damage of the lock. But what of that ? He would not be there long, he knew. He found the ladies where he had left them.

“ If you want proof,” he said, “ look here.” It was a *bona-fide* copy of a marriage certificate.

“ It’s true, Louisa,” said Amy. “ You were

never married to him at all;" and she began to feel something of her brother's gaiety of spirit.

"Where is your womanhood, Amy," cried Madame Pelbois bitterly, "that you triumph in my disgrace? If I am not his wife, what am I? A disgraced being, fit only to creep to a corner, and hide, and die."

"Why should you die, because you have been deceived?" replied her brother. "After all, is not anything better than to know yourself the property of that man?"

"At the cost of being no longer an honest woman," rejoined Louisa, with bitter irony. "I am to have my freedom from him at that price."

"Look here," said the doctor, striking the table with his heavy fist till it shook. "Let me hear none of that society cant about honest women. Is society your God to judge you? I believe," he went on, with an energy that caused the little room to vibrate, "that all this world's judgments will be reversed in another. There can be no disgrace where there is no sin."

“ But I live in the world, and what will the world call me when they get to know ? ”

“ Can it matter what the world calls you, when it called the greatest and purest being that ever lived, blasphemer ? Hold up your head, and do not fear. Give the lie to any word, by your look. Integrity is stronger than slander, and silent truth invulnerable against busy lies. I promise you, you shall have no time to dwell on this ; you shall be up and doing. I mean to take the white house I spoke of ; not to leave you in it all day when I’m away, though. I shall do what Mr. Saltring long ago recommended ; I shall have a carriage, and you shall go out with me ; and you can’t think about everything all at once.”

Louisa only looked more melancholy at all this, said to cheer her. She would have to learn like a child how not to be miserable ; and it threatened to be as hard a lesson as any she had ever had to learn.

The doctor, however, was sanguine. Nothing seemed to check the sudden flow of his spirits since he had had the proof.

And before long the white house scheme was

carried into execution, much to the general satisfaction of the Langtonians, who looked upon the doctor as their property, and his respectability as in some way or other reflected upon them.





CHAPTER XII.

KEZIAH SPEAKS.



AMMA," said Lucy Beredith, looking up from some work she was doing, "I can't be quite happy, for Rupert looks so sad. I thought at least we should be happy to-day, when to-morrow we are to be married."

"You cannot expect him to look happy, my dear, until it is all over. It is afterwards you may hope to make him happy, and then you must not expect everything to happen in a day."

"I wouldn't so much mind, if I could feel sure it would come right afterwards."

"Nobody can know the future," Mrs. Beredith replied; "it is well they can't. You'll be all right,

so long as you do not demand too much of a man who has had his experience. He can't help growing to love you, Lucy. I am sure he was beginning to love you before he saw Keziah. If you are always kind and gentle, and willing to let him be gloomy and silent, and never look gloomy and silent yourself because of it, I will answer for it, it will be as happy a marriage as anyone could desire." And the good lady thought in her own mind, and it may be forgiven her, that Lucy was after all so much more lovable and more suitable to be Dr. Elworthy's wife than Keziah. "You see, my dear," she went on, "you will go right away from England, and be seeing new things. There will be nothing to remind him of England and trouble; and enjoying things together is sure to prove a great tie."

Lucy smiled, though not very happily. "But what if," she said, with hesitation, "it should all prove wrong afterwards? What can we do then?"

Mrs. Beredith held up her white fat hands deprecatingly. "Those are only morbid fancies," she said, "foolish, morbid fancies. When I married

your father, I wondered whether we should get on, and all that sort of thing, and what could happen if we did not. But we got on all right, and were the best of friends, though it wasn't exactly a love match." And her eyelid trembled a little, and her ample bosom heaved.

"But you see, papa had never loved anybody but you."

"But I had loved some one else," replied her mother; and seeing Lucy's astonished look, she gathered her apron up, with her work in it, and abruptly changed the subject. "We'll see if Eliza has finished those things, so that we can fasten up that box, at any rate. You had better come up and have them tried on; or else you may find some difficulty when you get away. You won't find your buttons come off; I've sewn them on. But if anything should come undone, don't forget that the little sandalwood box in the corner of the tin trunk has got everything for mending in it. When I went away with your poor papa to Scotland, I never got to the bottom of one of my boxes; and part of a flounce came off a puce dress I had, quite a favourite

of your poor papa's; and we couldn't get any silk to match it, to mend it with, and I was so vexed that none had been put into my box. And when I came back and the boxes were unpacked, there was plenty of that silk at the bottom of one; so my advice to you is, unpack your boxes when you get away, and see what you've got. But you won't have much trouble, because the odds and ends are not spread about as mine were, and all the mending things are together in the sandal box; and the other little boxes have each a label on them, so you can know what's in, by looking outside. When I went away I was always unwrapping or undoing the wrong thing, and you shan't have any of that trouble. But come now, leave what you are doing, and we'll see if the bodices fit. Dear, dear," she said, in going upstairs, "I hope Miss Richards won't be long before sending those dresses; you'll have to go without them if she's much longer; for I'm quite determined no box shall be left to be closed to-morrow morning. None of my boxes were closed the night before, when I went away, and everybody was in such a dreadful flurry on the morning that they

didn't get half fastened up; and when we got to Carlisle, they just threw my boxes out of the van on to the platform—those porters are so careless—and one was quite open when I came up to it, and it was so full that your poor papa and two porters had to sit on it to get it to shut again, and all the people laughed; and then it wouldn't lock, because the lock was broken; and your poor papa had to give five shillings to a porter to get some cord of his own and do it up. Oh, the way your poor papa threw about the money! Rupert won't do that, I guess."

They were now standing in Lucy's room, which was in a pretty disorder. Not a chair, not a table but held its treasure of beautiful garments made for this important event. There were far more than could have been necessary; but as a child has never too many dresses for its doll, so the mother can never get enough dresses for her daughter who is going to be married.

"Look, Lucy," said Mrs. Beredith, dropping on her knees in front of one of the open boxes; "all the linen is together in this box. I think it much better that you should have all of one kind of thing

together. Mine was sadly mixed up when I went away."

She took no notice that Lucy did not reply to anything she was saying. It was but natural that the child should be quiet. There could be nothing remarkable in that.

The bodices were next fitted, and proving satisfactory, took their place in one of the boxes.

"Who is that coming upstairs?" said Lucy, when she was putting on her dress again.

"How can I tell, my dear?" replied Mrs. Beredith. "But how scared you look! You shouldn't allow yourself to get so nervous."

Mrs. Beredith might have admonished herself on the same subject a moment later, for she uttered a wild cry. In the doorway stood Keziah, with a face so white, eyes so unnaturally dark, and a manner so agitated, that anyone might have been forgiven for being frightened at sight of her.

Lucy trembled like an aspen. Keziah stared at them both like an animal at bay; then at all the preparations. Her wild eyes took in everything. With a sudden movement she placed

herself before Lucy, and was clutching her at arm's length.

"Lucy," she said, "you cannot do it. You must not do it. You dare not do it!"

Lucy had such a terrified look in her face that her mother interposed.

"Keziah," she said, "it is not kind, it is not generous of you to come like this."

"It is, it is," cried Keziah, looking wildly into Lucy's face, and not at all at Mrs. Beredith. "I know what it is, Lucy. You have no right to do it. You must know you have no right to do it."

"Keziah," said Mrs. Beredith, pitilessly, "I must beg you to leave my child."

"Oh, no, no, no," cried Keziah, "I will never let her go, I will never leave her, till she has promised never to commit this sin against me. Lucy, he is not yours, he is mine, mine," she cried, flinging up her arms, "you know he is mine. God knows he is mine."

Lucy opened her pale lips, and a voice spoke from between them, that neither of the others would have recognised. It was at Keziah she was looking,

but to her mother she spoke. "She is quite right," she said. "I thought it could never come to pass." And then her form swayed, and she would have fallen on the floor, but for Keziah; she was quite senseless in her arms.

"Lay her down," shrieked Mrs. Beredith, "you have no right to touch her. It was an evil day you ever came to this house, Keziah Hackbit." And she fell to chafing her daughter's hands, unloosing her things, and performing all the other offices usual on such occasions.

Lucy's eyes opened, and they fell on a white satin dress that hung on a sheet-covered chair. Her brow was contracted painfully, and she said with great effort, "Take them all out of my sight, mamma. Never let me see one of them again, as you love me."

Mrs. Beredith groaned, and looking fixedly at Keziah, who was holding to a bed-post, she began to rain abuse upon her.

"Look what you have done, and perhaps your cruel heart will be satisfied. Oh, I would not be you for all the world, to have made so many people

miserable as you have. Wherever you have been you have brought sorrow, and all of your own choosing and willing. If I were you, Keziah, I would go to the uttermost parts of the earth and hide myself. You are a very heartless, wicked girl."

Keziah's great eyes stared at Mrs. Beredith, like those of a child who is beaten, it knows not what for. Her face was rigid, and one little hand was so tightly shut by her side that the mark of every nail was left in the pink palm.

She loosed her hold of the bedstead, and moved her hands desolately and helplessly before her. "What can I say? What can I do?" said poor Keziah. "Nobody will believe any good of me, I know. Perhaps," she added, bursting into a passionate flood of tears, "if I had had a home like Lucy's, and a different bringing up altogether, I shouldn't have done all I have. But it's no matter. Oh," she cried, in a heartbroken tone, "if I had never wanted to do what was right, at all, I might have been happier. Everything has always gone contrary with me; I will give up trying. Oh, I hope no one will ever like me at all any more; then I shan't make

them miserable. Oh, God," she exclaimed with a sudden energy, "I wish I had never been born; it wasn't worth while." Anyone who could have seen her at that moment might have pitied her—except Mrs. Beredith; and how could she be expected to do so, with her own child now lying desolate upon her breast, undone by Keziah?

"You were always so headstrong," cried Mrs. Beredith, roughly. "You would never be advised."

"Who ever tried? You don't know, you don't know, Mrs. Beredith, what it is to be obliged, whether you like it or not, to judge and act for yourself when you are ever, ever so young, and to have no one care what you do because they like you; it makes you headstrong."

"I am sure you had a chance when you came here," said Mrs. Beredith, unbendingly.

"I know it," replied Keziah, humbly. "But I couldn't change my nature all in a minute. Ah," she said, a bitter smile passing over a white face, "those things that are hammered in hard stick fast, and if you pull them out the mark is left. I don't know," she continued, "why I was made with so

many corners, and with so much wish not to have any. It doesn't go together, not at all."

"You could always talk," rejoined Mrs. Beredith, "and wisely enough, no doubt. But all your acts have been foolish, all of them."

"It is quite true," said Keziah, with an evident over-willingness to own herself in the wrong. "I have come here now to try and undo some of it."

"A nice way to undo it," retorted Mrs. Beredith, hotly. "You come to seek for yourself, and to make my child desolate—she who loved him all along, better, much better, than you did. How did she treat you? You are proud. You have often said so. You don't like it to be said that he threw you off, and married another."

"Do you think," broke out Keziah, hotly, in her turn, "that that is what I have come for? Do you think I would have come at all, had I believed he would have been happy with her, or she with him?"

"He would have loved her if he had married her," said Mrs. Beredith, caressing the white face that lay upon her bosom; "when he was bound to her, and it was his duty to think of no other."

“ Oh, Mrs. Beredith,” cried Keziah, with a face that spoke of experience, “ duty and possibility are so far apart sometimes. Love does not come after marriage that has not been there before.”

“ You know nothing about it,” said Mrs. Beredith, “ nothing at all.”

“ Perhaps I know more than most,” rejoined Keziah, “ about that.”

“ I suppose Dr. Elworthy knows nothing then,” replied Mrs. Beredith, indignantly. “ He was neither blind nor mad when he proposed to my daughter.”

“ Yes,” answered Keziah, in a soft voice, and very sadly, “ he was both blind and mad. I have trodden this dark path. I could not let him tread it too. He is my husband before God; no one has a right to take him from me. Lucy,” she said, suddenly, kneeling down by her side, “ can you forgive me ? ”

“ Oh, don’t,” said Mrs. Beredith, as if she could not bear it.

“ Let me kiss you before I go; I may never see you again,” begged Keziah, in an enticing tone, so

full of pathos, few could have resisted it. "You will kiss me?" she repeated.

The girl turned her face nearer to her mother, away from Keziah, and moaned: "Some day, perhaps; I cannot now."

Keziah looked once at the mother. It was of no use to ask any mark of reconciliation from her, so she left the room and gently closed the door behind her.





CHAPTER XIII.

REST AT LAST.



ABOUT seven o'clock the same evening Mrs. Beredith's front-door bell rang, and Dr. Elworthy was announced.

Mrs. Beredith sent down a message that she was unable to see him. This he interpreted in a sense far from the true one. It was, after all, not to be wondered at, on the evening before she was to lose her daughter. But he wrote upon a card, "I most earnestly beg that you will see me."

He expected that on receipt of this she would forthwith make her appearance, flurried, perhaps, and peevish, from being forced against her will. But it was some little time before she came. Her eyes were red and swollen.

Elworthy at once noted this, and attributed it to the prospective loss of her child. She just looked once at the doctor, and saw that something was wrong with him too. She, who had seen him through his worst times of trouble, could not recollect a single occasion when he had looked so ill and wretched as he did now. She almost softened towards him for a moment.

“How ill you look!” she said.

“Mrs. Beredith,” he began, advancing towards her, with his chin upon his breast, “I am come to prove myself a villain. But you must forgive me, for you will be the gainer.”

He instantly perceived she did not understand him. He would have to speak more plainly.

“I, who ought to be happy, am perhaps of all men most miserable. In the eleventh hour I come, as I have said, like a villain, to beg for my release.”

Mrs. Beredith had had one shock, but she had not expected this to follow it.

“So you have seen her!” was her reply, in a biting tone.

“Seen her!” cried Elworthy, throwing back the

hair from his brow with a desperate impatience. "No, I have not. I may never see her again. But I cannot so wrong your daughter as to bind her to me, when with my whole being I love another woman to distraction."

"You might at least have found all this out before," exclaimed Mrs. Beredith, shaking from head to foot.

"I deserve all you can say to me," he answered. "But believe me, I have tried to do it. I have tried not to break faith, but it was not in human nature. You who have seen my anguish and my temptation, my hopeless misery for love of that woman, which is as strong to-day as ever it was, can you not pity me, a very little perhaps, but still pity me? And perhaps make Lucy know sometime, how I thanked her in my heart for her goodwill towards me, and respected her, and would die at this moment could I undo the sorrow I have caused to her and to others?"

Mrs. Beredith turned her head, and cast down her eyes, while she moved one foot restlessly up and down the carpet.

“She will not talk about dying,” rejoined Mrs. Beredith at last; “she will do it. Oh, why could you not have let us alone when we were happy, when the poor child had taught herself not to think of you? It was very, very cruel of you. She has not deserved it of you.”

“No, she has not deserved it,” said Elworthy, compassionately. “I have called myself a villain. If I knew a worse epithet, I would use it now. Mrs. Beredith, hear me, try and hear me. God is my witness that I have tried to fulfil my word to Lucy. That is why I appear in so much worse a light in coming at the eleventh hour to break faith with her.”

At the words, “break faith with her,” Mrs. Beredith froze again. “You might have spared yourself the trouble, Dr. Elworthy,” she said; “Lucy would not have married you. There is a letter on its way to your house now to tell you so.” And then she made a half movement, as if to end the interview.

He looked at her, with an accumulated amazement in his face, as if this thing were quite beyond his comprehension.

"Lucy is ill," went on the lady. "I must beg that you will leave me, that I may go to her."

His heart smote him at these words. "She has seen my trouble," he thought, "and has released me voluntarily."

"How shall I speak?" he said. "How shall I express my gratitude to her for her noble act in releasing me of her own accord? Next to her who is indeed a part of my very being, Lucy Beredith ranks among women. Some day, a long time hence perhaps, I may be able to tell her so."

"Do not mistake the situation, Dr. Elworthy," said the mother, with a terrible effort evident in her manner. "It is this other woman who has done it, and not my poor child. It is Keziah Hackbit who has been here."

His heart at these words beat so violently, he could hear it. He thought Mrs. Beredith must hear it too.

He cried in a frenzied tone, hysterical laughter breaking from him with his words, "She has been here! She! O my love, my love!" He quite forgot he was standing in the presence of the mother

of the other girl who loved him, and whom he was forsaking. His cheeks, that had grown so sunken and pale, were flushed with excitement. Wild laughter again and again broke from him, and then the tears, hot and large, rapidly chased each other down his cheeks, and he repeated again and again—

“She came here! She did it! O my brave girl, my own Keziah!”

All this was more than Mrs. Beredith could bear. She fled from the room, and he did not seem to notice that he was alone.

When he did perceive it, however, it was the work of a moment to take his hat, which he had put down on the table, and to rush from the place in an ecstasy of uncontrollable joy. He understood what such an act meant. Keziah had come, and had prevented his marrying another. He sped along the streets, by instinct rather than anything else, till he reached his own house. He entered the surgery, where Gerald Harwyn was making an entry in a book.

Elworthy in two strides crossed the surgery to where Gerald Harwyn was standing at the desk, and

seizing his hands, the one with the pen as well as the other, knocked over the ink without noticing it in the least, and shook Gerald's hands until his coat sleeves were performing the office of blotting paper in the pool upon the book.

"Gerald, my boy, congratulate me! The 'happy ever after' time of the story has come. A deuced long time it's been coming."

"I congratulate you," said Gerald, in his own mind fearing his poor friend had lost his wits. "But tell me what for."

"Can you ask? You, a man of your intelligence, can ask such a thing? There is but one 'happy ever after' to my story."

"Well, well," said Gerald, not understanding. "If you'll stop mopping up that ink with my coat sleeves, and sit down and tell me all about it, I shall be better able to judge how much right you have to congratulations."

"She's been to her!" said Elworthy, laughing boisterously.

"She's . . . been . . . to . . . her," repeated Gerald, checking the words off on his fingers.

“Who has been to whom? Hang it, man, be a little more explicit.”

“Keziah, of course,” replied Elworthy. “She’s been to Lucy and put it all right. I couldn’t stand it any longer; so, after I had seen the last patient, I went round there to beg Lucy to free me. You know I should have sinned against her if I had married her.”

“Hang it if I can understand what you have to rejoice so much about!” said Gerald, hotly. “It’s very heartless of you, and very selfish, to be thinking so much of yourself, when you have made that sweet girl so miserable. It was a dastardly trick of you.”

“I was mad when I did it, you know I was, Gerald; but I pray Lucy may forgive me.”

“Some kinds of madness ought to be punishable, I think,” said Gerald, applying blotting paper to his sleeves and the page of the book.

“I think I have been punished for every kind of punishable madness, then,” returned Elworthy.

Gerald went on grimly mopping up the ink. “Why didn’t you do as I told you, and tell her at once, and not let her go on till the very day before

the wedding, and then break off with her. It is a sneaking trick."

"I know it is. Go ahead, old man. Pitch into me as much as you like. Nothing could make me miserable, now I know she loves me enough to have done that."

"Has she been there to-day?" inquired Gerald.

"Yes, to-day. I wonder if she has left Leamington," he added, consulting his watch.

"Of course they have."

"Well, there's another train, yet. The train I am going by. They may not have gone."

"Why there's a horse coming round," said Gerald. "Why it's yours, and a boy bringing it!"

"Oh," exclaimed Elworthy, with a burst of joyful laughter, "I left it fastened to the Berediths' palings."

"I wish to goodness you hadn't knocked this ink over. I don't know for my life now whether it's June or July or August these cases are down for."

"They'll let you know when the time comes," said Elworthy. "Anyhow, I'm off." And he took his hat again, and went to the railway station. The

train for Manchester was waiting, but not ready to start. He ran the length of the train. Snugly ensconced in a first-class carriage, sat Keziah, and by her side was her uncle David, comforting her.

Elworthy did not speak to her. He rushed and got his ticket, then quietly stepped into the carriage as the train was moving off; and taking her little hands in his, spoke not one word; but they looked into each other's eyes, and were at rest.

Poor David, who was always being startled in one way or another, stared out of the window and blew his nose, with astonishing persistency considering he had not a cold.





CHAPTER XIV.

WIDE AS THE POLES ASUNDER.



AS Keziah particularly wished that her happy wedding should take place from the same house which had witnessed her ill-fated union to Hackbit, and as Mr. Rimmon eagerly welcomed any

plan which allowed of his showing his newly acquired furniture to a festive party, Dr. Elworthy was persuaded to appear at Jumley in the character of a bridegroom. But we should not dwell upon any incidents connected with this wedding, were it not that Madeline had been specially pressed to come with Mrs. Saltring from Langton, and had yielded after much solicitation, being quite ignorant that Rimpler resided at Mr. Rimmon's.

Even Rimplers do not know everything that concerns them; and Silas happened never to hear Miss Orme's name as one of the invited guests, and failed to learn that she had actually arrived, for he had taken up his quarters temporarily at a hotel. He undertook as large a proportion as possible of the outside arrangements for the wedding, and had even refused to sit down at the wedding-breakfast, that he might see that everything was sent in in due order, and that there should be no delay with the carriages.

He had, however, dropped in after Keziah went up stairs, when the carriage was standing at the door: and had drunk to Keziah in her absence. It was at this point that Madeline and Mrs. Saltring suddenly went out of the room. No one thought anything of this; at a wedding breakfast somebody not unfrequently goes out, at some stage or other, overcome; and the general attention was drawn away from Madeline and Mrs. Saltring's exit, by the extraordinary expression of countenance Miss Dorcas put on at the entrance of Mr. Rimpler. There was no mistaking the look; it was one of mingled

hatred, malice, contempt, and defiance, which only some faces can combine in one expression. Everybody saw the look, including Mr. Rimpler himself, who was clever enough to show no sign of it, but in consequence had to concentrate his attention in such a manner that he did not notice who went out of the room.

Mr. Rimpler had made a sort of programme for the entertainment of the wedding guests, at Mr. Rimmon's suggestion. After breakfast the whole party was to be driven to Angleton Park, the seat of Lord Jumley; and at a pretty country inn on the outskirts of this park, a dainty lunch had been ordered for 2.30. The day was a glorious one, as it to favour this scheme: and Keziah had scarcely been waved off before two carriages arrived for this expedition.

To every one's surprise, and to the great annoyance of some, Madeline begged not to be one of the party. Mrs. Saltring could say nothing in explanation, though she did her best, that would content the others. The drive would do Madeline good. Madeline must come; and she, poor girl,

with a face of alabaster, at length consented to go.

Mr. Rimpler had made inquiries about Madeline since encountering her at the Saltrings', and had recently wormed it out of some one who knew, that she was Mr. Rockingham's niece. He could hardly have told why, but this feature in the case made him appear to himself a worse villain. It was not then on the daughter of an ordinary music hall singer that he had practised his fraud. Such persons were used to that sort of thing, he thought. But it was a lady, of noble descent, who had been sacrificed by a direct imposition on her own good nature and unselfishness.

Let it not be inferred, however, that Rimpler included any other than this one act of his life under the denomination of villainy; the rest was all fair-play. Where there were fools, there must be knaves, he considered. It was a provision of nature which would improve the race, sooner or later, by sharpening the said fools on the knaves' grindstones. He had often argued this in his own mind, as an occupation in the dark, at his window. It is only

nature, Mr. Rimpler would think; everything is linked to everything else in nature. What a pest the flies would be, if it were not for the spiders to eat them up. So with many other disagreeable things, nature provided a check to their undue multiplication. The knaves were the check to the undue multiplication of fools. Then was it his fault that he had been chosen an instrument to this latter end? Not at all. It was a merit rather. The human race had much to thank him for, and those like him. He had heard somewhere that physical qualities, even organs, degenerated, and were ultimately lost under persistent disuse. The wits of even the wise, if not exercised to defeat the knaves, would thus degenerate, no doubt. He was a universal benefactor. He roused fools from their apathy, and exercised the wits of the wise: and in the process considerably sharpened his own. It was not for anything of this kind that he should call himself a villain. But Madeline had not been a fool. She had been caught by reason of her own goodness and unselfishness, and had been rendered wretched.

It was clear the past could not be altered by any

amount of cursing and reviling. He took out his pocket-book, in which we have seen him make entries; and wrote upon a leaf of it, in Italian, of which language he knew Madeline to be mistress: "Be at ease. I see you recognise me. I am too much ashamed of myself ever to press my acquaintance upon you: I send this only that you may be sure that I shall treat you as a stranger on all occasions when we may chance to meet, which is the least I can do to make reparation."

He had written this, and had folded it up and palmed it, when he found they were very near to the little inn; and he began to mentally gather himself together to form some quick and undetectable plan of conveying his little note to Madeline's hand. In his usual cool fashion, he dismounted when the carriage stopped, and gracefully helped out Mrs. Saltring before Mr. Rimmon had even thought of alighting. He next gave his hand gravely to Madeline, who trembled a good deal. He appeared profoundly unconscious of this, and wore his gravest look. No detective could have imagined, if he had looked at Mr. Rimpler's countenance, that he had

ever met this lady before ; much less would he have thought he was conveying something to her hand. Madeline knew it, however ; and had she not perceived by his face that he did not wish people to know they were anything but strangers, she would have been terrified. She could not let the note fall, and show there had been one ; so her hand closed upon it.

Madeline moved towards the window of the room into which the party was introduced, with the slip of paper folded between her fingers, and nobody noticed her. Her back was towards everyone ; and by a subtle instinct some women have, she felt she must take this opportunity of glancing at her paper. How could she guess, indeed, what grave importance might attach to her knowing its contents at once ?

Mr. Rimpler, who was engaged in giving directions to a waiter at the other end of the room, knew by her attitude that she was reading the letter. She took her purse from her pocket, and put the folded paper into it, just as she was joined by Maud Towers.

At this juncture Miss Dorcas, feeling rather in the shade for a moment, made her way to these two, and, with an insolence some people show a mastery of, threw herself headlong into conversation by remarking that the Misses Langley's dresses (the minister's daughters, who had been bridesmaids) were a figure. "And that all comes," she added, "of their going to a cheap dressmaker, as can't fit, spoiling good stuff. If they'd have come to me, now, to make them, they should have looked fit to be seen."

Neither Maud nor Madeline answered; both looked extremely uncomfortable; and Miss Dorcas was not slow to see that she had made a mistake in addressing her remarks to them. She moved off without apology, but with a great jerk; and said to her sister-in-law, quite audibly, "that of all the stuck-up peacocks, that Mrs. Towers and Miss What's-her-name as came with Mrs. Saltring, were the tiptoppest. Can't hear half a word without sticking up their heads and looking at you as if they could slay you. I've no patience with proud peacocks."

Mrs. Rimmon touched her sister-in-law's sleeve by way of a hint that she was being overheard.

"I'm not ashamed of what I say," said Miss Dorcas, who was in a bad temper, owing to Mr. Rimpler's neglect of her. "If people will be proud peacocks, they must expect to be talked about."

Mr. Rimpler chanced to hear Dorcas's last remark; and instantly judging at whom it was levelled, gave Dorcas a look which would have appalled any one else. But she was notably reckless, and would have her fling, as she often said, if she died for it. With a sudden inspiration she looked Rimpler full in the face, and asked him when he had come to the throne; at which sally she was so much delighted that she laughed uproariously, attracting general attention to her. She should have waited for Rimpler's answer.

"I've never been in danger of coming to the throne; but I have been in danger of being dragged against my will to a certain altar several times. That is," he added, as if to make his meaning quite clear, "I should have been, had not the lady lacked all personal charm both of face and years, and

manner and voice, and all the rest, having nothing in fact to drag with but her perseverance." And with this he turned away.

Dorcas was so overpoweringly angry, that the first thing she thought of—a common enough thought in the Black Country, too—was the purchase of vitriol. But everybody else made an effort to pass the thing over; and though all understood who the lady referred to was, there was not the least proof against Mr. Rimpler. He had not committed himself in any way.

The luncheon was a great success, and after it the party set out to walk in the park. Mr. Rimpler had noticed that Madeline was more comfortable than at first. He was glad of that; and he now did his best to entertain Mrs. Saltring, who had fallen to his lot since they had come out. All at once, he beheld seated upon a bench a woman, with grey hair and a ragged shawl. On her arm was an old canvas bag; and she looked miserable enough for anything. Mr. Rimpler for some reason could scarcely keep down his excitement. He said to Mrs. Saltring, quietly enough for all that, "We must not see a person look

so wretched as that on so gay a day ;” and he fumbled in his pocket.

Mrs. Saltring, with pleased eyes watched him go up to the woman, and bestow his willing alms upon her. She did not hear, however, the few words Mr. Rimpler spoke to the woman, or she might have seen an altogether different meaning in his act. In that brief moment he had made an arrangement with her to meet him at the tavern they had just quitted, the next day. He then passed on, as if nothing had occurred : and everything went merrily, and everyone seemed sorry when it was time to return to Jumley.





CHAPTER XV.

CONNUBIAL AMENITIES.



THE sojourn abroad of Mr. and Mrs. Jubal Rimmon was considerably protracted; and it was not until the first week in August that a Channel steamer, not too seaworthy, was nearing Newhaven, with a precious cargo indeed. The journey had been made by night, and the sea looked as blue as the sky overhead, and the white cliffs quite dazzling in the morning sunlight. Laura, with a peevish, discontented look upon her face, for which, perhaps, we ought to have some commiseration, since she had been suffering from sea-sickness, was regarding the pretty view from the deck of the steamer. Jubal,

a thought thinner than when we last saw him, appeared to be making no effort at all to brighten the spirits of his partner, but puffed away at a big cigar quite spitefully.

At length a small creature in a blue shawl came on deck, and looked timidly about her. She was speedily followed, and her arm taken by a lady who appeared to be her mother. Laura, out of mere curiosity, watched the couple seat themselves on the side of the steamer; and then they turned their faces towards her.

"Jubal," she said, giving her lord a tug, "do you see who that is?"

"No, I don't; nobody I know."

"It's Lucy Beredith and her mother."

"Can't help it if it is," replied Jubal, continuing to puff.

"At least you might take a little interest in what I say."

"Other people take too much interest in what you say, for me to take much."

"I haven't the ghost of a notion what you mean," returned Laura, tossing her head. "But there are

those Berediths. I wonder how it was we didn't see them when we came on board."

"I did see them at Saint Lazare," observed Jubal, with the same ill-natured tone and look; "and I saw them get into our train, and I saw them come on board."

"Then why couldn't you tell me?"

"A nice rage you'd get into, if I were always narrating to you everybody I saw."

"What a time we are getting in, when we are quite close to, and have been ever so long, to all appearance," remarked Laura, in answer to this. "It is a horrible steamer. You ought to have looked after it better, as other gentlemen would do. But no one can expect you to be a gentleman."

"There's only one gentleman in the world, we know," retorted Jubal, "since Winterfold put in an appearance at Paris. And the devil knows how he found us out."

"I'm very glad he did," said Laura, crossly pulling a thread out of her glove. "It would have been dull enough without him. I suppose you didn't encourage him to come at all, did you? You didn't

want it to be thought at the hotel that your friend was the son of a lord, did you, Jubal?"

She always called him Jubal when she was not on particularly good terms with him, which had been rather frequently of late.

"Are you going to speak to those Berediths?" Jubal had asked, when a sudden lurch of the ship sent him ignominiously into a sitting posture on the seat near his wife—he had been standing before.

Laura burst into a laugh, and several other passengers, who had come on deck, were moved to smile also. Jubal's hat had flown off, and rolled with the movement of the vessel to the feet of the Berediths. He was very angry; more angry with Laura than anyone else, for laughing at him. He was proud of her beauty, and was as really in love with her as his nature could be; and he wished to be envied, and that the world should see that she was all his own. It appeared to him that her careless laughing at his misfortune would suggest to the minds of all who had seen it, that the young lady could not be very much in love with her husband. The casual observer of human nature is quick to notice and give their

full value to indications of this kind. A wife—above all, a new wife, who is in love with her husband—would feel his being seen in a ridiculous or foolish position, in a sense doubly keen.

But Laura seemed rather to enjoy Jubal's discomfiture, as he unsteadily followed his truant head-gear to the feet of the two ladies.

He apologised to them as he picked his hat up and placed it on his head ; and when he turned, he saw a young French girl, an article Jubal had purchased for his wife with his uncle David's money, in the act of receiving a spirited account of his misadventure from her mistress. This was too much for Jubal. He took in the situation at a glance, and did not go towards his wife, but remained sulkily where he was ; and the ship ploughed on through the water, and the white cliffs came nearer and nearer.

Jubal determined not to look after the luggage properly on landing, as the readiest means of avenging himself on his wife for her want of feeling : and he became better tempered in prospect of this. One thing he meant to look after, and only one :

and that was his own bag lined with cigars, on which he meant to pay no duty. He likewise resolved to get drunk, which he knew Laura objected to, not on moral, but on artistic grounds. Jubal was an appendage of her own, and she always remembered this when he made a beast of himself, as she called it, though she appeared to have forgotten it just now, when Jubal fell. But then, after all, it was fate that had done that; and Jubal chose to get drunk.

It has been seen that Laura made no step towards speaking to the Berediths. The Berediths, nevertheless, had recognised her, and had known her well enough not to expect her to accost them.

“Don’t you think, mamma, that Laura is handsomer than ever?” Lucy said to her mother, with eyes fixed on the white cliffs they were every moment nearing.

“I certainly do,” Mrs. Beredith acknowledged unwillingly. She would have been glad had the fact been less evident. She was angry with Laura.

“Don’t you think it strange that we should have been on the same ship?”

“I should have stayed for the later ship if I had known they were coming over,” said Mrs. Beredith rather sharply; “and if that’s Keziah brother, he’s very much of her type.”

Here Mrs. Beredith was wrong. But we all judge incorrectly of people against whom we have a preconceived opinion.

“Why doesn’t he go to her?” remarked Lucy. “They don’t appear to be on very good terms. O mamma,” she added, turning her wistful face away from the chalk cliffs, and towards her mother, “if I had married *him*, and were returning with him in this steamer instead of you, we should have been farther apart than we are now.”

The mother sighed, and said nothing.

“I see it all differently now, mamma,” went on Lucy. “I know it would never have done, and I want to tell Keziah so. I am sure he now thinks kindly of me. Had I married him, he would have hated me by now. And how much better to be separated from him as I am, than to have him hate me, and I be tied to him. I am sure, fate was kinder to me than I knew; and time is kind. When

I last saw that shore, I was wishing I might never see it again ; and now I am just longing to get back and see the old home. It was very kind of Gerald Harwyn to write so often."

Mrs. Beredith looked inquiringly at her daughter, as if not quite sure what this phrase meant, introduced suddenly as it was, and without apparent reason. Gerald Harwyn had written regularly to Mrs. Beredith, to make inquiries about Lucy, since they had left England, which they had done immediately after the events we have before described ; and Lucy had certainly read his letters with evident pleasure. After all, that might be but natural. Any sympathy, if it be real, is acceptable in time of pain ; and Mrs. Beredith had not attached much meaning to Lucy's gratification.

The steamer was at last close to the shore and entering the harbour, and Jubal, leisurely enough, advanced towards his wife and told her she might as well gather her traps together—that was the phrase he used—if she had left any in the cabin. They would be in in a minute.

" Perhaps you may go and inquire about them,"

rejoined Laura saucily, "seeing you are so very steady on your feet, and we are so very near shore." The eyes of the little French maid twinkled at this sally ; but she nevertheless said that Monsieur must not trouble himself to go for the things ; she would go at once herself and see if there were anything of her mistress's left below.

"At any rate, Jubal," observed Laura, "you can look after the boxes, and see that some of them don't get carried off by somebody else."

"They'll see to that," replied Jubal, vaguely indicating he knew not whom. "I'm not going to bother about anything, except breakfast. An infernal wash of coffee they'll get for us, I know."

"But really," insisted Laura, gathering her cardinal wrap about her, and dropping from her pedestal of satire, and mounting that of anger, "You must look after the things, Jubal ; you know they will be lost, and things stolen out of them. You must stand by all the time they look in them, too, and see they don't take anything out of all those lovely things I have bought."

"Lovely things be hanged," said Jubal rudely ;

“what the devil did you want to get so many things for? It’s through you buying so many things that we had to have the new boxes to carry them in, and got charged for excess luggage.”

“Well, we don’t go to Paris every day,” returned Laura indignantly.

“Uncle David may be very glad we don’t,” answered Jubal. “It has cost enough.”

And, now, with a loud grating noise, and a little shudder, the steamer stopped: and then began the rush to land.

Jubal kept his word about the boxes; and they were ruthlessly opened and turned over, without any remonstrance from him. The only thing he took an interest in was his leather bag, which he opened himself and pushed towards the officer with a careless air, as much as to say, “You may look; there’s nothing wrong with that.” All it appeared to contain was a half-empty flask of brandy and a few toilet requisites. The officer pushed it back towards him with some impatience; and Jubal, triumphant, marched away with his cigars to the crowded breakfast room, which looked uninviting enough. The

proprietors well knew that the travellers must breakfast, at no matter what cost, and that they must take what was put before them, or else face the next part of the journey without anything. So the several tables were spread in no very attractive manner with food which would have been left untasted in a London restaurant. The passengers, who had for the most part been sea-sick, contented themselves with mild grumbling at the stewed tea and wretched coffee served to them at an extortionate price.





CHAPTER XVI.

AN OMINOUS HOME-COMING.



AT Manchester great preparations had been made for the arrival of the bride and bridegroom. Everything that David Rimmon could think of, to add to the comfort of the young couple, had been purchased and arranged for, and David's hopes ran high: for was not there a chance that the boy he had adopted would go steadily to business, and sober down in every respect? And poor David thoroughly believed that this would be the case. It has been said that we believe what we wish to believe, and David's spirits had gone up during the prolonged wedding tour, and he had heaped belief upon belief, and hopes upon beliefs, until they all intermingled,

and until he had attained a buoyancy as of present possession, all the more pleasant in contrast with his recent experience of failure and disappointment. As our travellers, weary, and not good-tempered, were nearing their destination, after having remained three days in London, David, anxious, red-faced, and important, made sharp and very unnecessary excursions from his front gate to his kitchen, and from the kitchen to the dining-room, where a meal was laid. The most perplexing thing of all to him in this situation was to find nothing that wanted doing. Everything was ready hours before it was needed.

In one of these little excursions to the garden gate, David espied a girl of no ordinary beauty, so it appeared to him, examining either himself or his house with considerable minuteness; and, thinking he might be of use to her in pointing out a house she was looking for, he asked her politely whose house she was in search of.

“Well, now really,” she replied, advancing towards him with an assurance that astonished David not a little, “it’s not a house I’m in search of, it’s a

person. "I generally keep clear of the houses," she added with a light laugh.

She was now close to David, and his face became redder than ever, as he marked the manner in which she was gazing at him; and he simply looked at her without saying anything.

"You look," she went on, "as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth; but if you've got money in your pocket, I could teach you to alter that. But perhaps you can tell me where Jubal Rimmon lives."

David felt as if he had been suddenly struck by lightning. He could no longer doubt what this woman was; and she was asking for Jubal. To David this thing was so full of horror that he could not hide what he felt. Large drops of perspiration broke out on his brow, and he gasped out an appeal that she would go away, asking her if it were money she wanted, and praying her in such a manner to avoid his nephew, that it would have taken a harder heart than this girl really had to withstand it.

"Look here," she said, dropping her flippant tone, and adopting one with a good deal of womanly tenderness in it, "I won't take any money, and I

won't see him again if I can help it. We're not all so bad as they call us," she added, "and I can't bear to see anyone look like you look now. Good-bye, sir." She moved away, but suddenly retracing her steps, she faced David, who was standing where she had left him, as if petrified.

"You go to church, sir?"

He made no response.

"You do, I know," she said, not caring whether he answered or not. "When you are there next, give a little prayer for me; it'll be the first and perhaps the last that is ever said for me." She turned at once without waiting for a reply, with hot tears on her cheeks, called there, not by any words David had spoken, but by reason of the integrity of the man, together with the kindheartedness that had shone out on his face while she had spoken with him. As she turned, a cab drove round the corner at a rapid rate. The girl was walking carelessly and fast, and before she or the driver could do anything to prevent it, the horse had thrown her down. The cab contained the returning travellers.

The girl struggled to her feet as the driver pulled

his horse up. She was not hurt. The cab door was thrown open, and Jubal Rimmon stared at her, as she staggered to her feet, with a look of mingled wrath and amazement. But the knife, we recollect, had been to the grinder's and got sharpened, and the Jubal of the opening of our first volume is not the Jubal of to-day.

"Are you hurt, young woman?" he said, in a lordly, indifferent way, as if he did not know her in the least.

The girl, with a scornful look on her countenance, involuntarily glanced farther into the cab as she noticed this tone in Jubal, and met Laura's eyes fastened like a snake's upon her. She took in the situation, and said, in deep irony—

"People are not always clever enough to deceive the wife who is quick-witted." Then with a mocking laugh she passed on, not deigning to brush the dust from her garments, and wondered within herself how it was that relations could be so opposite in nature. For she had gathered from a certain family resemblance, which could scarcely be called a likeness at all, that David was a relative of Jubal;

besides which, Mr. Scratch, while in a drunken fit, had given Jubal's address to her, and had told her he lived with an uncle. She had reasons for encountering Jubal at all costs; but she abandoned the pursuit, for the time at least, so long as other things should not have banished David's look from her mind. And as the couple got out of the cab, and the girl turned the corner, Jubal muttered a curse between his teeth, and passed his uncle at the gate without so much as shaking hands, or noticing him in any way. Neither did he help Laura out of the cab, nor offer to pay the cabman, which indeed he would have been puzzled to do, as he possessed at that moment about three halfpence in hard cash.

David, inwardly blushing at his nephew's treatment of his new wife, tried to make up for it by extra politeness on his own part, and helped her out of the cab, in a manner worthy of Sir Charles Grandison, though we doubt if David Rimmon had ever heard of that gentleman; and it was quite a matter of course that he paid the cabman. It was plain to his eyes that Jubal had very speedily tired of his new toy, if he could treat her like that; and

for his own part he could not in the least understand how any man should tire of such a beautiful creature as Laura.

They had scarcely entered the house when another cab drove up and stopped opposite The Chestnuts: and out of the window a small head with little twinkling black eyes peeped. Then the door opened, and a small personage with very much the air of a bantam cock stepped out, and directed the cabman as to the manner in which some of the boxes should be lifted.

"It's coming here," exclaimed David, pointing to the boxes, and inwardly dreading lest this should be some other applicant for Jubal Rimmon.

"Oh, yes," drawled Jubal, "I forgot to tell you, we couldn't get on without a maid for Laura, she having been used to one all her life," he added with a sneer.

This was a sudden shock for David, who had made no preparation for a third person. However, he meant to make the best of it, as he did of most things.

“All right,” he replied, in his usual mild yielding fashion, “of course, quite right.”

Laura, who had entered one of the rooms, turned back on hearing that her maid had arrived, and expressed her pleasure. The two ascended to the bedroom floor, and were so long upstairs that the cutlets got quite spoilt, and David dreaded—he knew not how much—sitting down to table, because everything was not perfection.

The ordeal of the tea-table and spoilt dishes was not destined to be gone through, however, by David, although it might have been preferable to the obstacle that prevented it. A telegraph messenger came up the garden path, as David looked through the window, ill at ease, with one of the ill-boding terra-cotta coloured envelopes in his hand. It is only the very fortunate who constantly have telegraphic messages of a pleasant description, and have therefore no dread of their contents at sight of the envelope. David was not one of the fortunate; and having received the telegram from the hand of his servants, he made two or three futile attempts to open it.

“Hang it, uncle,” said Jubal, “any one would think you had betted on the wrong horse, and were receiving the notice of it. Why don’t you open it ! ”

David, as if in a dream, opened his telegram, and his features worked with evident excitement as he read. It was from James Elworthy, Leamington, and ran as follows :—“Come at once. Keziah dangerously ill. Have brought her home.”

Jubal, a cigar in his mouth, swaggered up to his uncle, and impudently took the telegram from him.

“What a blessed fool that Elworthy is,” was his comment.

David, without a remark, passed out of the room, and in a dazed way took his hat and walked off.

Has the reader ever seen a dog in the first stage of hydrophobia rushing on in a direct line, in its search for water, which it will nevertheless refuse to taste if it finds ? It was in something of this manner that David Rimmon walked towards the station. He passed nobody who did not turn and look after him. If he had thought of the spoilt cutlets they would have seemed as some small thing that he had been

concerned about years before. Keziah dangerously ill ! Keziah brought home ! In that sharp walk to the station, as much as he had known of Keziah's life crowded into his mind ; and more especially instances of her tenderness to himself were vividly in his consciousness. All the world except Keziah had been far-off from him. There had been only this one being, in a world so thickly populated, for him to think of with affection and no anxiety, with admiration and almost worship. There had been one other towards whom his soul had gone out, but it had been his duty not to think of her. Keziah was left to him to be the recipient of his full heart, overflowing with affection, yet finding but this single object. Strange that this should be so, while thousands in a cruel world would forfeit all to be loved as David Rimmon could love.

At the station David hurriedly asked if the last train to take him into Manchester was gone—to take him in he meant in time for the last to Leamington. No, there was a train in now. He flung down some money recklessly, and went away without the

change. He was going to Keziah; Keziah, who was dangerously ill.

While David was hurrying towards Leamington, his nephew, and his niece by marriage, were turning their noses up in a style that would have given him considerable uneasiness, at the half-cold viands; and from sharp language and cross looks they relapsed into silence. Keziah's sudden illness aroused no sympathy in them. Nevertheless, it was a peg to hang a dispute upon.

"Upon my word," observed Laura, "you are an affectionate and tender-hearted brother, to sit there stuffing yourself like a pig, when you have just heard that your sister's at the point of death."

"Indeed," retorted Jubal, superciliously. "It's the first time I ever heard you express any interest in Keziah, though, no doubt, in keeping with your usual all-round good nature, you've always taken the greatest interest in her inwardly. Pray oblige me by not likening me so often to such an uninteresting animal as a pig. My ambition doesn't lie in that direction."

"I liken you to one because you remind me of

one. In company you affect all the neatness of the gentleman. In private you emulate your ancestors. I prefer the company of a gentleman to that of a metamorphosed collier."

"I declare, Laura," burst out Jubal, colouring deeply, and the muscles of his face standing out firm and evident, "it will be the worse for you if you get trying this game on. You may go just a trifle too far. By heaven, you'll make me silence that tongue of yours for ever, one of these days."

"I wish I had a witness to that speech," said Laura, biting, affecting to be more at ease than she was, for Jubal looked very wrathful indeed; and as if in answer to this, the lady's-maid presented herself in a stealthy and cat-like manner, and looked at this young lord of creation with her small serpent-like eyes, her cheeks of an unhealthy pallor, and her coils of black hair fixed in a kind of turban on the top of her head.

"Annette," said Laura, in her own spiteful manner, "did you hear your master say anything as you came in?"

“I have no wish to make myself involved,” replied the lady’s-maid stonily.

“He said he would silence my tongue for ever, one of these days. Did you hear that?”

Annette had not heard, but she decided to pretend she had: therefore she remained silent.





CHAPTER XVII.

STRAINED TOO FAR.



ORROW and death heal estrangements which time unaided could not cure. After all, when we speak of the healing hand of time in reference to trouble, ill-feeling, losses, it may not be the passing of day after day, of week after week, the mere passing, that makes the difference. It is rather the events which the weeks bring with them, silent victors demanding for themselves absorbing attention, for the time at least. Yet, without lapse of time, a single event is sometimes strong enough to heal what threatened to be a life-long feud.

Perhaps only those who are themselves mothers

will understand how bitterly Mrs. Beredith felt towards Keziah. Yet, hearing from Gerald Harwyn, immediately on her return home from the Continent, that he had a telegram from Elworthy, telling him to make preparations to receive his wife, who appeared very ill, Mrs. Beredith at once began to relent towards Keziah, and unconsciously to frame excuses for her. Keziah happy, Keziah victorious, she could be angry with. Keziah broken down, incapable of enjoying her victory, perhaps dying, and about to forfeit everything, found a place in Mrs. Beredith's womanly heart. She seemed to forget for the moment her daughter's position; for Lucy was the first to hear the lamentation that broke from her after she had learnt the news. Lucy, for her part, who had long since forgiven Keziah, now felt piqued with her mother. It was all very well to play the part of a forgiving angel herself, but it was a *rôle* she did not care to see her mother play so readily. So far was Lucy human, though the poor child had scarcely a fault. Lucy therefore watched her mother's preparations to go to Dr. Elworthy's, with a silence which might have

spoken volumes, had Mrs. Beredith been less absorbed. As it was, Mrs. Beredith with her own hands prepared the room that was to receive Keziah, and awaited her arrival as if a fixture in the establishment. She had ascertained from Gerald that no one of Keziah's relatives had as yet been informed of her illness; so there would be no woman present but herself, except the servants.

"But no one is needed here," Gerald said. "I have no doubt at all Elworthy will nurse her himself; and," he added, with evident hesitation, "do you not think that, after what has occurred, Mrs. Elworthy might find it too much for her, in her present condition, to see you?"

"Oh, nonsense," said the lady hotly, looking at him with the special scorn older people adopt towards those who are younger than themselves, and have any pretensions to superior knowledge. "Men know nothing at all about that, and I know Keziah much better than you do. It will do her good to see me, and to know we are friends again. She has not a bit of resentment in her."

"Of course," said Gerald coldly, "it is not my

business." He was thinking of Lucy, and resented Mrs. Beredith's coming.

Mrs. Beredith tossed her head just a little, sniffed in the air, after the manner of people who could say a great deal and choose to keep silent ; and installed herself.

It was evening, when a carriage stopped at the door, and Mrs. Beredith trembled as she thought that within a few minutes she must see Keziah, and must realise how much she was changed. Dr. Elworthy had not said what was the matter with her, but she must be very ill indeed for him to bring her home thus ; of that at least she felt sure.

The hall door was opened. Mrs. Beredith could not go out, but stood behind the door of the room in which she was, trembling as if something were about to break loose upon her. She heard Elworthy's voice, harsh and impatient to everyone except Keziah ; and the contrast was so great when he spoke a pitying word to her, and when he addressed a remark to any of the others, it might have been two different persons who spoke.

The footsteps passed from the hall up the stair-

case, and Mrs. Beredith knew that Keziah was being carried up to her room ; yet she remained as if glued to the spot. She had lighted a fire in Keziah's room ; and she was sure that she heard Elworthy making some angry remark about it.

She must have remained half-an-hour, stationed in the same spot, when she heard a footfall on the stairs. She knew the step well : it was Elworthy's. He entered the room where she was, and where some refreshment was laid. He turned a haggard and angry face on her. She tried to speak, but the words would not come. She felt as she remembered to have done in a nightmare, when she had been in great danger, and could not even utter a cry.

Elworthy sat down without remark, and commenced to eat, not like a man, but like an automaton. He looked curses when he happened to glance her way ; yet he was not specially angry with Mrs. Beredith. He was at war with the world. He was at war with the fate that had dashed the ripe fruit from his lips. Mrs. Beredith was not that fate, but she was part of the universe that beheld his misery, and he resented her presence.

When he had finished eating, he rose to go, and just observed, as if addressing a stranger who had chanced to be there —

“ Be sure you do not bang the door when you go out.”

He left the room, and went upstairs. Gerald had remained with Keziah, while Elworthy snatched a meal ; and he found him bathing her head, which was once more shorn of its curls, with eau-de-Cologne and spirits of wine. The room was almost absolutely dark. The fire was screened. Rugs had been laid all along the landing, that no footfall might be heard. Gerald was about to make some remark in a low tone, but Elworthy impatiently signed to him to be silent. He passed once more out of the room, and summoned his housekeeper. He led her to his wife’s room, and bade her stay there without speaking a word, while he and Mr. Harwyn consulted in another room. The housekeeper would have fallen back with terror on entering the room, had she not used strong self-control. Keziah’s eyes were glaring at her like two great suns out of the darkness, and she accosted her the instant she entered the room.

“Ah,” she said, rapidly, twitching her fingers incessantly, “I told you what it would be. What did you bring me for? Look, it’s coming again; take me away first.”

“Where from?” asked the housekeeper, who had forgotten her master’s injunction.

“Can’t you see it?” replied Keziah. “It’s buried cities, and the burning lava pours down upon my head.”

The housekeeper grew desperately frightened.

“That isn’t the worst,” went on Keziah. “He forsook me there, and left me to my fate. Now wasn’t it unkind? We were only just married.”

“Oh, good lack-a-day,” said the housekeeper, wringing her hands, “but you’re mistaken about that.”

Keziah, not heeding her, rambled on without rest, in a manner that would tire any hearer to listen to. “It wasn’t kind, after pretending to care for me so, to go and leave me here on this terrible mountain.” Then, in a confidential tone, she continued, “I ought to have died, I suppose. It would have been all right then, and I should have

been at rest ; but I can't die. I am never to die. I know I shall never die. Look here, whoever you are, ask them not to ring those bells ; there can be no need for it. How strange ! What a terrible noise this makes ! I never saw waggons and horses going up a mountain before. They make more noise than the coal carts in line with the jaggars."

In the meantime the unhappy husband and Gerald were discussing Keziah's case.

"When did you first notice anything strange in her ?" Gerald asked.

"I thought she was not natural on our wedding-day, but I hoped she'd be all right when we got away. She seemed gloomy, and complained of a weight on her head and a tendency to fall forward if she stooped the least bit. She described it as top-heaviness."

"The brain is terribly congested," said Gerald. "There's no use in having further advice, is there ? These cases always require the same treatment. There's nothing but quiet and the nursing we shall give." As Gerald spoke he looked into his companion's face, and saw such agony in it that he

involuntarily seized the clenched hand that was fixed to Elworthy's side, and grasped it with such brotherly tenderness that Elworthy, who was frightfully overstrung, flung himself into his chair, weeping bitterly. His grief was terrible to witness, and Gerald felt his heart ache for him. He placed his arm on Elworthy's shoulder, and fell to caressing him as he might have done a woman.

By Elworthy's suggestion, Gerald telegraphed for his sister, who arrived next day. Maud entered the house by the surgery door by mere accident, and was met by her brother on the threshold. He suddenly, at the sight of her, became very red; and Gerald had one of those transparent complexions on which the slightest tinge of pink shows conspicuously. This did not strike Maud as being at all remarkable, till she noticed in the surgery a neat little lady in brown, whose colour was rivalling Gerald's at that moment. Maud merely glanced at her, and took her for a patient uncomfortable in the presence of the doctor, and was going to pass through the surgery, when Gerald in a hesitating manner suddenly introduced her to the little brown

lady. "My sister, Mrs. Towers—Miss Beredith," he said.

Maud stretched out her hand and grasped Lucy's, that trembled and fluttered like a little bird in hers. "I am so glad to meet you," Maud said. "I have heard much good of you, my dear. Is this the way, Gerald," she added, "or perhaps Miss Beredith will show me?"

"I was just going," stammered Lucy, very ill at ease.

"Oh, don't go yet," said Gerald impatiently. "I'll show Maud. I want to speak to you."

Lucy, left alone, cast frightened glances at the strange objects, the bottles and jars, and the ghastly prints of anatomical subjects upon the wall; she was half afraid of a skeleton that occupied one corner.

It did not appear to have taken Gerald long to show Maud upstairs, for he came back very quickly, and had not lost the red colour upon his face; and Lucy's returned at sight of him.

"What did you want me for?" Lucy asked, in her gentle voice.

"Ah!" said Gerald, taking a bottle down from

a shelf and critically smelling at a cork, "I wanted to ask you how you liked my sister."

The surgery door here opened, admitting a little boy who called for "the mixture and powders."

"Whom did you say it was for?" Gerald asked, impatiently and roughly.

"Mother," replied the small boy, staring all the time at Miss Beredith.

"D—— you," said Gerald; "why can't you say her name?"

The boy didn't look much taken aback by this; he was probably used to being sworn at. But Lucy did look very much shocked, and marked her displeasure by quitting the surgery with a cool bow.

Gerald could have bitten his tongue out, but that could not alter the case. Lucy had gone; and he couldn't go racing after her. She would think him—he didn't know what she would think him—probably she would think nothing about him any more. The mixture was not ready. Gerald began to mix it with unsteady fingers, and unconsciously pulled down the wrong bottles, and finally, wasted two or three bottlefuls, through not having noticed

how much opium he put in. The little boy, patient, stood looking at the wonders of the surgery, and no doubt thought it was all right that the mixture should be so long in making, at least if he thought at all. The mixture being at last prepared, Gerald handed it over, together with a sixpence for himself, which was a conscience offering, and which would probably have had the effect of making all the little boys in Leamington come to be sworn at, if they could have understood the case.

In the meantime, Maud had found her way through the darkness of the room to Keziah's side, and sat down beside her without rustle or sound of any kind. Keziah, nevertheless, with great strained eyes, in which there was no astonishment, only fixed wildness, watched her seat herself, and immediately addressed her. Maud was startled to hear herself called by her name.'

"You see, Maud," Keziah began, as if she were continuing a conversation that had been commenced at some other time, "you may all of you be sorry, but you can't help me away from here. He need not have left me here; he could have done something

else. But it seems natural that you and I should be together, doesn't it?" she babbled on. "We have borne a great deal together, haven't we? Come, we must try to move under that shelter; see, the projecting rock. One step; the lava, it's coming again," and Keziah began to spring forward in the bed. Her husband, who had been in the shadow, came at once, and tenderly put his arms about her, speaking to her in tones so full of pity and affection, they might have moved the hardest heart. But Keziah, with a strength quite astonishing, repulsed him with both her hands. "There is but one I love, and he has left me to die miserably here. No one else shall come near me. Yes," she went on, with a weary smile, "I would rather die by his hand, or his neglect, than live by the help of some other. Come, Maud, let us go away." Then in a sharp whisper, distinctly audible, "Don't let that man come near me again; I loathe him. Who is he?"

Elworthy in his experience as a doctor could find nothing new in this sort of thing. Yet he felt that it was entirely new to him; and he inwardly prayed, as his heart bled, that, should his darling be spared

to recover and be his own Keziah again, the suffering he was now passing through might make him tenderer both to patients and their friends. As he sat there he recalled scenes which had moved him little at the time, and faces watching by bedsides hearing like things to those he heard now stood out and haunted him reproachfully in the darkness of this room, for the manner in which he had gone on his way and forgotten them.

Two days later, David Rimmon was sent for, because Keziah had taken up a new cry; she continually asked to see her uncle. When David arrived, very late indeed, and by instinct went straight upstairs to Keziah's room after taking off his boots, he placed himself at her bedside, silently, like one of the genii of the Arabian Nights who has been summoned and who appears without even a "Here am I." Mrs. Beredith was taking her turn in Keziah's room when this occurred; she and Maud were taking the nursing in turns. She guessed who David was, but David in the gloom could not see Mrs. Beredith. He believed himself alone with Keziah.

Keziah, restlessly moving her head from one side to another, staring into the gloom with the great eyes that would never blink, clutching with her two little hands from time to time at her shaved head, and incessantly muttering, at last dropped one little hand on David's, which was resting upon the quilt, then convulsively moved her eyes towards the hand she had touched. "That is uncle David's hand," she said, in a more natural voice.

"It is, it is, my darling," said David, beginning to rain tears in great splashes upon her hand, that was so hot, "At your service for ever, my lamb," he went on, so gently he might have been born a refined gentleman instead of a collier's son.

Mrs. Beredith came with fresh cloths, dipped in spirits of wine and eau-de-Cologne, and put them on the poor girl's burning head. David had his head bowed over the little hand, so hot and restless, and did not notice her. Keziah had let her head rest on that side of the pillow nearest her uncle, and said, softly—

"I'm not afraid, now you are come. He left me here to die." Then the lids closed over the strained

eyes, and as her husband, worn and anxious, softly entered the room, he saw that Keziah was asleep.

“God be praised,” he said to himself. “She will recover now.”

It was two hours before Keziah opened her eyes again, and David was still there, and his hand was clasping hers. Elworthy pointed to some beef tea, and Mrs. Beredith carried it to Keziah. Strange freak of brain-maladies, that during them those best beloved are sometimes abhorred. Elworthy, who loved Keziah better than his life, and whom Keziah loved as few women ever have loved, this Elworthy was the only one Keziah would not allow to approach her in this illness. If he administered either medicine or nourishment, she was seized at once with frenzy; and all those little tender offices, to have performed which would have made his lot less hard, he was obliged to forego. Keziah knew the others: him she loved she took for a stranger. Yet he kept every vigil with her, and out of sight in the darkness of her room, he sat for hours behind a curtain, and prayed for her, and wept for her.

Mrs Beredith at some of these times would put

her arms round him as if he had been her son, and laying his head upon her bosom, mingled her tears with his, till he would look at her at last and whisper the invariable phrase—"As one whom his mother comforteth."

At nine o'clock next morning, as Maud passed the surgery door on her way to breakfast, she heard her brother in conversation with someone; it was the little lady in brown.

"I could have blown out my brains for it," she heard her brother say, "the minute after; and if you had never come again to inquire as usual, I should have done it. I tried to write to you two or three times to tell you how sorry and ashamed I was, but I couldn't."

"You needn't mind about my opinion," replied a gentle voice. "It can be of no moment to any one."

"But it's everything to me," said Gerald, raising his voice; "everything, Lucy, because you are everything, more than everything to me. With you, I could be happy anywhere, under any circumstance. Without you, I would rather die than face it. Oh Lucy, give me one little word

of hope, and make me happier than man ever yet was."

Maud, who had been involuntarily transfixed, now moved away with a hot blush on her own cheek. Yet she was pleased; and when Maud was pleased she had a way of being extremely kind to other people. She went into the dining-room and gave David his breakfast, with a lavish kindliness of voice and manner that would have thrown David into the third heaven of delight had not Keziah been ill.

When Keziah had slowly crept back into life, Lucy Beredith, who unceasingly made inquiries after her progress, was admitted one morning to see her. At mention of Lucy, a little flush came into Keziah's cheek, and she eagerly looked for her coming.

Maud was in the room when Lucy came in with her gentle step, trembling visibly. She advanced towards her in a moment, and taking her by the hand, led her to Keziah's bedside.

"Kizzy, my pet," she said in a caressing tone she had never used to Keziah until her illness,

"I must introduce this little lady to you afresh."

Something trembled on Keziah's lips, but no sound came.

"She is soon to be my little sister," said Maud.
"Yes, it is quite true, you needn't look surprised. She is going to be Gerald's wife."

Tears now welled into Keziah's eyes as she fixed a glad look on Lucy, who in her turn flung her arms about Keziah and began to weep. It was the knowledge that Lucy was sure to act in this way that had caused her banishment from the sick-room up to this time.

"Oh, Kizzy," said Lucy, "how much I thank you that you did not let me do that wicked thing. It was so brave and so good of you, and saved us all so much misery, and it would all have been such a mistake. I am sure I mistook myself all along; I had never been in love, Kizzy, I know that now. I only thought it. I am so easily fond of anyone who is kind and good to me. I mistook it, I suppose; but I do thank you." And now the hard part of her task being over, she raised a glad and

tear-stained face and said merrily, "Now, Kizzy, I am only waiting for you to get well enough to come to the wedding."

"Maud," said Keziah, in her old impulsive tone, "I am too happy to stay in bed. Can't I be dressed to-morrow? I am sure I am quite well."

"We will see about that," replied Maud, pursing up her lips, and nodding to Lucy to go. Lucy had to hug Keziah over and over again before this could take place, declaring she was never so happy in her life. During this scene, Elworthy came into the room to see, as he said, that his patient was not being ill-used: and at sight of him a lovely light came into Keziah's eyes, which only he ever called up. He silently sat down beside her and took her little hand, and the two looked into each other's eyes as if they could never tire.

"Come, Lucy," said Maud, "we are *de trop*," and they left the room.

When they reached the bottom of the stairs Lucy's eyes involuntarily turned towards the surgery, and she hesitated.

"No," said Maud, "he is not there this time."

Lucy blushed. "But I must tell you, Miss Lucy," Maud went on with her first finger held up in a lecturing style, "you might have made all your inquiries by coming to the front door in an ordinary way instead of always to the surgery."

"Oh, Mrs. Towers," rejoined Lucy, in an alarmed voice, "do you think it wasn't proper of me? You see, I thought," she went on, blushing more deeply, "I should get to know more correctly if I saw either Dr. Elworthy or—Gerald."

"Oh, you are an artful little creature," said Maud. "Love will find out a way, I suppose. But if you don't learn to call me Maud, in a sisterly fashion, I shall report this proceeding to Mrs. Beredith, and she wouldn't treat it so lightly as I have done."

Lucy didn't understand Maud's manner, yet, and the tears came into her eyes at this rebuke. Maud passed her arm round her in a sheltering way, and, kissing Lucy's cheek, said, "There, don't be a ridiculous little puss. Don't you think I would hail any chance that won you for my brother?"

Lucy was comforted; and as it was her way to

pass quickly from tears to sunshine, and from sunshine to tears, she said, with a beaming countenance, "I do hope Kizzy will be downstairs soon."

"Why, I wonder?" said Maud, teasingly.

"Because I love her," Lucy replied.

"And for no other reason?" suggested Maud.

"Ah, I cannot resist teasing you. But you are quite right to be so happy. Make the most of it; it only comes once in a lifetime. To some it never comes at all." And she gave a little sigh. Her thoughts had flown to the Bowdon cemetery. Kizzy was getting better, and she was longing to get back to be within reach of that mound of earth.

Lucy, as she went tripping along the street on her way home, thought how wonderfully Maud had got over her husband's death. She did not realise that spiritual wounds, like physical ones, must be covered up.





CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. RIMPLER'S EXCURSION.



THE advent of Jubal among the Springwoods, on the morning but one after his return, was hailed with delight.

“Glad to see you, Rimmon,” said Springwood the elder, with a majestic wave of the hand. “We shall be happy if you will join our board.”

“He’s never happy to see people join our board, unless it’s to his own interest,” said the son, who had just quarrelled with his father. “I guess the governor wants you to cash up, Rimmon.”

Jubal was engaged in speaking to the ladies, and did not hear the last remark distinctly, for which reason Springwood the younger repeated it as Jubal

seated himself. Jubal, having had little money as a boy, was most ambitious to be considered "flush," as he termed it, now he was a man; so he remarked, with the air of a landed proprietor, "You shall have it to-morrow, Springwood. I'll bring it myself, and go to the play afterwards. I would pay you now, only a fellow can't go about without anything in his pocket, you know; so if it will be all the same to you, I'll bring it in to-morrow."

It would be all the same to the Springwoods, who, nevertheless, would much have preferred to see the cash then.

"Have you heard from Denleigh," Jubal asked, having dismissed the other affair, "or from Harris?"

"Off and on," was the reply.

"Winterfold is in Paris, you know," said Jubal; "we saw him the other day."

Springwood father winked at Springwood son. As a matter of fact, these two had just encountered Winterfold, not a street distant from where they were, and had private reasons for not apprising Jubal of the fact.

When the party rose to go to the theatre for

rehearsal, Jubal went home, and was astonished to find a gentleman in company with his wife. It was our old acquaintance Mr. Rimpler, who had come over, he asserted, because he wished, if possible, to re-establish friendly relations between a father and a son.

Mr. Rimpler soon perceived that by this beginning he had made a false step. It was quite certain, from the manner in which Jubal curled his lip and tossed his head, that his ambition did not lie in that direction. The wily Rimpler instantly threw out another bait.

“A mere figure of speech,” he said, throwing a kind of derision upon his last words. “But it might just be to your advantage that the property should come to you.”

Jubal pricked up his ears at this, for he was conscious that before long, possibly very soon, he should need another peg to hang his fortunes on than his uncle. He was convinced that this Mr. Rimpler must have some hidden reason for presenting himself thus in the light of a friend; and he did not desire Rimpler to suppose that he was the only

way to that most desirable end of which he had spoken.

"I thank you greatly, Mr. Rimpler," said he, sneeringly, "for the interest you take in this matter; but it is just possible that I have means of my own, without help from you, for directing my father's property into the right channel."

Yet while he spoke, he felt there was a hidden power in the small eyes, with all the flash and hardness of steel in them, that were fastened on him. Such a look, he knew, had always something to be feared at the back of it.

"Very well," responded Mr. Rimpler, rising with a smile of a demon on his face, "I came willing to make terms with you. The time for that has gone by. I now feel myself at liberty to use any information I may have about you and your proceedings, in any way that may seem to me good. I have the honour to wish you good-day."

Jubal at this moment would gladly have recalled Mr. Rimpler had such a course been consistent with his pride. Jubal was himself playing at the diabolical game of shooting in the dark, and knew enough

of its workings to dread the result of the words Mr. Rimpler had just uttered. As for Laura, she felt, for the time at least, enough fear to keep her quiet, for she was not at all assured, now that Mr. Rimpler was gone, and with him her confidence, that the business she and he had transacted together before Jubal's arrival, might not in some way be guessed. She took refuge in absolute silence, and pretended to read. Jubal, for his part, had a weighty matter upon his mind that demanded instant attention, quite independent of the questions Mr. Rimpler's visit called up. He had promised to pay Springwood the next day. He must resort to a plan he had already tried, and with success. He would not have been quite so comfortable about this, had he imagined, which he did not, that his method of obtaining ready cash was known to Mr. Rimpler. This was nevertheless the case, for that gentleman had been informed by a mutual acquaintance, not too nice upon points of honour, of Jubal's little process, although the gentleman in question had omitted to state at the same time that it was he who had suggested it to Jubal. It was this knowledge

that had induced Mr. Rimpler, in his character of possessor of secrets, to pay Jubal a visit.

Mr. Rimpler had had another purpose in coming, compared with which, the one he assigned as his reason was but insignificant. It had been a growing belief with him for a long time that Jubal had possessed himself of the missing papers belonging to his father, the loss of which had hung ever since like a sword over Joshua Rimmon's head. And as the fates usually favoured Mr. Rimpler's proceedings, they did not forsake him in this. He had found Laura in one of those spiteful moods in which she would have sold her dearest friend. He had obtained from her, almost with ease, the papers he desired; for Laura had made herself mistress of every secret possession of Jubal's, long ere this; and he had not a lock proof against her keys. There was this great difference between Silas Rimpler and Laura Rimmon. Silas would stop short at nothing provided he was to be a gainer by the transaction; Laura did her meanest actions with scarcely a thought of personal gain, that is, so far as the golden calf went; though in its proper place, far

from ignoring its attractions, she showed herself remarkably skilled in winning it to herself. She would stop at nothing to satisfy a moment's spite. She would have sacrificed any one in the world for this. But she would equally have sacrificed herself. Silas Rimpler would have laughed at that idea. They resembled each other in one other thing; vain regret was pretty equally unknown to either.

Silas, in his conversation with Laura, had begun by insinuating. The only thing she cared to know at that moment was that the loss of these papers would cause the greatest consternation to Jubal; and they were in Mr. Rimpler's pocket some little time before Jubal came in.

Mr. Rimpler did not immediately return to Jumley. Strange to narrate, his destination was the Springwoods'.

Opinions differ as to whether it is wise to have many irons in the fire; to argue the question is of little use where people have no choice but to have many irons in the fire. Few men, however, could manage many irons so well as Mr. Rimpler could. It might be said, as a figure of speech, that on his

way from Bowdon to the Springwoods' his mind was entirely engaged in at least three objects. One object, as the reader may be quite sure, was the ultimate reversion to himself of all Mr. Rimmon's possessions. Mr. Rimpler had calculated on this, on first identifying himself with Mr. Rimmon, as an assured fact. He thought, moreover, that it could be managed without the exercise of any special skill on his part; but in this the schemer had been mistaken. He had been able to extort from Mr. Rimmon, in addition to his own salary, little beyond the promise of a legacy; and Mr. Rimpler, resembling a famous murderer of whom De Quincey writes, always went in for wholesale business. He would not have a legacy among others; he would have everything. Of course he was sure of obtaining the property, only it was annoying to have any trouble about it. He had not yet used the weapon of threats. The thing he had wished to secure was, that Jubal should not be in a position to threaten as heavily as he; and this he had accomplished with little enough trouble to satisfy even himself.

It was after midnight, and Mr. Rimpler stood in the street watching the stage exit. Many passed him on their way out without noticing him at all; and he noticed no one until the manager and proprietor himself appeared. When he came out, Mr. Rimpler, after the manner of one who has met someone by appointment, linked his arm in Springwood the elder's, and, without ceremony, went to his apartments with him.

"Where have you hidden yourself all this time?" said Springwood, looking with more astonishment than warmth upon Mr. Rimpler.

"It has never been my way to tell anything, however trivial, unless there was an occasion for it," Rimpler replied.

"That's true, at any rate," returned Springwood. "And to tell you another piece of truth, you are not quite so welcome as you seem to have taken it for granted you would be."

"Nevertheless," rejoined Rimpler, with a smile, "my visit will not be unpleasant to you that I am aware of, this time, for it happens to be an extremely simple matter I've come about, and one that could

scarcely prove annoying to you or to anybody. I have come to tell you that I have seen Nancy."

"You have!" exclaimed Springwood in astonishment.

"I told you that it was my wish not to know what was done with the child."

"Yes, you did," said Springwood, with emphasis. "And we haven't told you."

"But I have changed my mind. I particularly want to trace the child, and I am most anxious to know if what Nancy has told me is true. She says it was a collier's wife she confided it to, called Barker. Is that the truth? And is it true that she lived at Jumley?"

"Yes, that's quite true."

They were standing on the threshold of Springwood's apartments.

"Then I will bid you good-night," said Mr. Rimpler, marching away without even shaking hands.

"Can it be that he has a father's heart in his bosom after all?" said Springwood theatrically, when he had disappeared.



CHAPTER XIX.

JUBAL DETECTED.



AVID RIMMON had been absent at Leamington about a fortnight, when Jubal came home one afternoon to Laura with a face of ghastly pallor. "Laura," he said, closing the door of the drawing-room, in the tone of a man who must speak to somebody, even though it will be to one who will not sympathise. "Laura, I'm in an infernal mess."

She did not answer with one of her piquant, stinging phrases. If Jubal were in an infernal mess, she was; at least she would have to bear it. She listened, that was all. Jubal looked very ill, and drank from a decanter that was on the table, and stared in a bewildered fashion.

“I’ve got caught in a trap,” he said. “There’s only one chance for me. I’ve sent a telegram to my Uncle David.”

“For goodness’ sake tell me what it is,” said Laura, blanched in her turn.

Jubal blurted out his next words like a man who does not simply turn a tap on, but pulls it out boldly. “I’ve been helping myself to his cash, that’s it, for this long time past. It wouldn’t have come to light at all, if I hadn’t gone in for such a big lot this time. They’ve paid all the other cheques without any question; but when I went to cash this one, this morning, the clerk went and talked to somebody else, and they looked at the cheque with a magnifier, and kept comparing it with some others; and at last, he just stepped up and said, ‘Mr. Franks will come down and see Mr. Rimmon about it.’ And I, like a fool, said he was away from home, and said where he was. And they said, ‘well, Mr. Franks would run down by the evening train, and see him’, at that cursed Elworthy’s. So I telegraphed to uncle when I got away, telling him that the business he would hear of that evening was my doing, and

begging him to forgive me ; and he's such an infernal ass, he's sure to do it, unless his confounded honesty goes against it ; so now you know our chances. It shuts up everything here, of course. We shall have to go somewhere else, Laura ; and I shall make my father cash up for us."

With this he left Laura and went to his bed-chamber. He thought the tide had come to the flood with him, as regarded his throwing his father into consternation, and possessing himself of what he chose of his ill-gotten gains. In three minutes he came downstairs in a towering passion, and, darting into the room with an oath, clutched Laura by the throat, and glared in her face as though he would have murdered her. "They have been stolen," he hissed, "and it is you who have done it, you mean, deceitful, thieving wretch."

Jubal did not seem to think for a moment that these epithets might be equally applicable to himself.

"You have ruined us both, you she-devil." He flung her from him, brutally kicked her, left the room, and went and got drunk.

So drunk did Jubal Rimmon get that night that

he was unable to raise himself at one o'clock the next afternoon; and he was in this condition of splitting headache and abject wretchedness when David Rimmon entered the room where he was.

There was something grand about the look of David as he entered. Some men require the bitterest extremities which can befall them in order to bring to the fore that greatness of courage which has acted in their daily life as but the silent promoter of their gentle forbearance.

"Jubal," said David, with a grave dignity, surveying the handsome lad with the bloodshot eyes and tangled curls who was looking everywhere but at him, "Jubal," said David's steady voice, "we are to forgive up to seventy times seven——"

Jubal began to feel his head throbbing less. "The devil," he thought; "it's going to be all right, then."

The next words threw a damper over him, however.

"But when we are forgiven, punishment follows us. Not that I feel I have any right to punish. Vengeance is not mine. I forgive you, Jubal, and

I have not exposed you ; but you must leave my house, and win your bread for yourself, how you can."

Jubal's heart sank, and he groaned heavily.

"Shall I tell you the reason?" said David. "You have ruined me. You have been steadily and deliberately ruining me ever since I have taken you. I have always been remiss in looking at my accounts, knowing I had a good surplus at the bank. Would to God this had not been the case! It might have saved you from this sin. But had you known precisely what was in the bank to my account when you presented that cheque, you could not have gone nearer to taking everything. I have not now money to pay my mill hands their wages due. The little I have invested cannot be called in at a minute's notice. In the meantime I must borrow or ——;" but he did not finish his sentence. He left the room and inquired for Laura.

He would inquire a long time before he found her. She and her maid had quitted the house the night before, without leaving a message.

The discovery of all David had so recently learnt

was appalling to him. Jubal had in fact not done this business by halves. It was frightful to contemplate the amounts he had from time to time added to his uncle's liberal allowance, by the commonplace device of imitating his signature. Jubal could not have spent it all : of that David felt sure. He must have supplied others. David had believed his brother's method of training his son was wholly at fault, and that Jubal, treated in a totally different manner, with kindness and forbearance as the basis of everything, would blossom into a prodigy of honour. Others have thought this ; but the seed of a thistle, be it never so well tended and cultured, will produce but a thistle. Truly David did not know which way to turn : and he could not hide from himself the fact that Jubal had done nothing at all in the business, and was never likely to do anything. He had said to the man who had been sent to him from the bank, "It is all right," in such a tone of misery that the truth of the matter, with only one alternative, that of insanity, suggested itself to Mr. Franks. Jubal had proved himself a veritable thistle.

In the meantime Jubal had roused himself to

make some preparation for going, he did not precisely know where. It was at this moment that he realised that he had offended everybody who could have helped him in his extremity, including his Aunt Dorcas. While he was packing up, a happy thought struck him. He would go and say good-bye to his uncle. Everything, even his attitude, should indicate his despair and his dejection. He would thank his uncle fervently for the great kindness and forbearance he had always shown towards him. In fact he would act such a little play as should take David's too-yielding heart by storm.

This thought gave him so much hope, that it was with considerable difficulty he brought his countenance to shew the requisite amount of despair. David was sitting in the room he had formerly called his parlour, in an attitude of dejection and thoughtfulness, when Jubal softly opened the door and made a humble step into the room, then advanced no farther, but stood, hat in hand, his beautiful eyes only momentarily glancing at his uncle, and then drooping at once. David would have said something, but he could not begin.

Jubal himself opened the conversation. "I am come, sir," he began with a great show of humility, "to say good-bye to you, and to ask your pardon for the villainous way I have requited all your goodness to me." Here he choked a little. "We may never meet again on earth, sir; I do not deserve that we ever should. But I shall think of you night and day, and try hard to live as you would have me, though you will never know." Jubal choked again. "And now," he concluded, stepping forward with great hesitation, "will you shake hands with me before I go?"

David, with swimming eyes, rose to his feet, and rushed upon his nephew, flinging his arms about him, and holding him convulsively. Then, under his strong emotion, he relapsed into his native dialect, "You mun stay wi' me, Jubal, we wonna talk o't again;" and he fell to weeping aloud.

Jubal had not calculated on winning his day so easily as this, and was rather puzzled what to do with his victory. Moreover, to do him justice, it did touch him just a little, to see his uncle, who had been so deeply wronged, so ready to forgive. He managed

to gasp out, in a blundering fashion, "Indeed sir, you are too good to me. I will try to deserve it;" and he half meant what he said.

"What do you call me 'sir,' for?" said David.

"I hardly deserve to call you 'uncle,' again," Jubal answered, in a low voice.

After half-an-hour's talk of this broken and disjointed description, David became calmer.

"I suppose Laura has gone home to her father," said David.

"I suppose so," assented Jubal. "She and I had words, and I think she has gone home."

"You must try and be reconciled to her, Jubal. You ought to, you know, she is your wife."

But to this Jubal replied nothing at all.

David ordered in some refreshment; and then said he must go and try to make arrangements to get money to pay his hands. Jubal dutifully offered to go with him. David was very glad to find that Jubal would take any kind of interest in his affairs. He began to feel cheerful in spite of his difficulties; for if Jubal should gain in character by his misfortune, he would bear it very willingly. The two

went out together, David's arm linked affectionately through Jubal's, to the amazement of the servants, who had never seen such a thing before.

When they had left the house, David spoke to Jubal about his sister. "I am sure that Kizzy has felt it," he began, "that you have never sent a message to inquire about her. She asked as soon as ever she was well enough, if you had made any inquiry, and she would have an answer. Her life was saved by a miracle, Jubal, even if she is out of danger now."

"Yes," said Jubal, penitently, "that's another of my sins. Should you mind my going to Leamington, uncle?"

David's eyes beamed. "My dear nephew," he said, affectionately, "what do I care for my own misfortune in this matter, if it is so to change you? Yes, go to Leamington, and be good to your sister."

"I might find it advisable, uncle, to go to the Saltrings'. I told you Laura and I had some words, and I suppose she is gone there."

David was so happy on seeing this change in Jubal that he would have consented to any plan. In

fact, to hear Jubal speaking without a rasp in his voice was something so new that, in itself, it would have ensured almost any concession. In the wide world few men can be found to forgive as David Rimmon could. If he forgave, it was to remember the sin against the pardoned one no more for ever. No wonder people thought David Rimmon a fool.

When Jubal was in the train for Leamington, David lingered about the carriage door, wondering and wishing that there might be something else he could do to show Jubal how he was feeling towards him. Jubal looked out of the carriage window with a subdued face, and his eyes met his uncle's in a franker manner than they had ever done in his life.

"What shall I tell Kizzy from you, uncle?" he asked.

"Tell her, I shall come to see her again when I have settled my business."

"Anything else?"

"I don't think so." He was feeling the truth of the saying that there is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine that need no repentance; for Kizzy, to David's mind, had never

gone astray, while Jubal had done little but stray.

Jubal presented himself at his brother-in-law's the morning after his arrival, not without some fear and trembling. Gerald Harwyn was the first person he saw, and despite the change in Jubal's looks, Gerald instantly recognized him, probably on account of Jubal's frame of mind at the time, which was more in harmony with his usual frame of mind when he had been a pupil at Lionel Harwyn's. Gerald had heard no particular good of Jubal since then, and consequently was not very cordial in his reception of him.

"I didn't think of seeing you, Mr. Harwyn," Jubal began in a conciliatory manner.

"It's not much to be surprised at nevertheless," replied Gerald drily, "seeing that I live here."

"It hadn't occurred to me. I have come to see my sister."

"There is a proverb," broke in another voice, which was that of Dr. Elworthy himself, who had just entered, "'Better late than never.' For my part I am inclined to the opinion that in some cases

it is better never than late. I wonder you have the audacity to come, after the manner you have treated your sister," went on the doctor, warming. "During her delirium I have had to listen to a repetition of one conversation you had with her, I believe the last, until it has made my heart sick."

Keziah, however, was overjoyed to think that Jubal had come to see her. She had always loved this brother.

"Oh, Jubal," she exclaimed as he came into the room, "I can't tell you how glad I am that you've come."

There was light in the room now, and she feasted her eyes on him. He came forward with a bashful air, which had so long been foreign to him.

"I have had lots of dreams about you lately," went on Keziah, "but not one that you would care to see me"; and she held him away from her and feasted her eyes. "I was always so fond of you, Jubal; and we'll begin all over again and forget that we have ever quarrelled. Jubal, I had begun to think you really cruel, and that you would never come near me again. I was quite wrong.

We ought to be good friends, you and I. There were only two of us."

Jubal felt that all these words were like so many thongs lashing him into a right path. He was conscious, as she held his hands, that she was giving him credit now for feelings he never felt. He was conscious, too, that to do anything but act the part planned out for him would make him look much more despicable than if he had never come at all. So he blundered out an apology, a regret, a hope or two, and then let his sister talk as much as she would. He felt very hot and uncomfortable and wished himself out of the house. It would have been a great pleasure to him to tell her that he considered her husband a cur, and herself a creature of fancies and impulse, altogether to be despised for any practical value. It was quite possible for him, however, to liberate himself pretty soon on the excuse that he must look after his wife, who had gone away from him in a fit of temper. No doubt she had gone to Langton.



CHAPTER XX.

COLLAPSE OF THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

THE palatial residence and the Methodist cathedral were actually commenced. The foundation-stone of the cathedral had been laid by Mr. Furniss, M.P. for Jumley; and there had been a great demonstration. St. Martha's Church steps had been crowded with spectators, causing no little annoyance to the vicar, who had come in person to remonstrate, but had received a Black Country reception, which is equally strong for or against, as the occasion may require; and on this occasion it was against. It would have pleased Mr. Rimmon, could a foundation-stone of the palatial residence have been laid, too,

with like display : but he could see no way of bringing this about.

Mrs. Rimmon had been in clover ever since Keziah's marriage. Joshua had hardly ever been angry with her. In fact, he was practising, wholesale, manners he thought befitting the palatial residence. He had gone mad upon this idea ; and the more he dwelt upon his future magnificence, the more in his secret heart did he hanker after a reconciliation with Jubal, not, it must be owned, from any kindly or fatherly feelings, but from an ardent desire that the name of Rimmon should be perpetuated. He saw in the dim vista of future ages, Rimmons in Parliament ; nay, more than this, Rimmons knighted, Rimmons made baronets, Rimmons advisers of the Throne, Rimmons lending to foreign countries and receiving their own again with high interest.

Although he had only thought this in the innermost sanctum of his heart and with all the doors shut, the wily Rimpler was aware of at least the direction his thoughts were taking, and awoke to the knowledge that this Rimmon property would slip through his fingers if he did not bestir himself. There was

but one way to this end. He must possess himself of power to disestablish this owner of a future palatial residence; and he was certain in his own mind that Joshua Rimmon would rather lose all in this world than have his memory scouted and scorned when he had left it. So with a brain accustomed to keep facts in working order, he laid hands on the right article at once. Having heard from Joshua Rimmon that his brother David was at Leamington, and Jubal and Laura at Manchester, Mr. Rimpler espied the flood, and took it. He would have said that was the reason why he found Laura alone, for, with a kind of gambling spirit, he calculated that certain events most surely followed others.

He had possessed himself of more than he had expected. There was that other paper which had been so long in the possession of the grandmother; and Mr. Rimpler, reading that, had been thunder-struck. "It would transport him," he said. He had been carefully gathering up gold dust; and close to his hand had been valuable diamonds. He was being carried on to fortune, and the orderly brain, rather than any consciousness of his own, had told

his feet to carry him to Springwoods' on business we have heard of. Since meeting Madeline at the wedding, he had reproached himself pretty genuinely, considering what a hardened wretch he was, for having separated Madeline from her infant, and for telling her it was dead; and he determined to trace it if possible. If he should ascertain that Madeline would care to possess the child, he would so far make reparation for the terrible wrong he had done her. He had come home, and learnt, almost without asking a question, the fate of the woman to whom his child and Madeline's had been consigned, and, more than this, he had learnt that Keziah Rimmon had adopted it. On hearing this he felt that something within him had claimed kinship with that infant in the old days when it had been an ill-used dependent of Hackbit's; and it seemed to him a sort of happiness to be able to say to Madeline that the child she was so much attached to at the Saltrings' was her own. For himself he was glad that the child was not to be discovered in any of the slums he had to visit in the course of his work for Rimmon, but had been tenderly cared for and well and religiously brought

up. The latter consideration could matter little to himself, but it might go a long way with Madeline. And then he smiled his own cunning smile, and thought to himself how he would take credit for this business, and tell Madeline he had known all along, and watched over the child. This intention he actually carried into effect later on, and won, as a reward, a kind womanly note from Madeline, which he took as a compliment to his great ability in lying.

At this point it only remained to him to "come a cropper," as he termed it, on Mr. Rimmon. He must first see the indication of a flood. He would not be precipitate. Had Jubal been more precipitate, he might have gained this day. Why he had delayed at the time of the flood, Silas Rimpler could not imagine. And the palatial residence and the Methodist cathedral grew side by side, and were centres of interest in the neighbourhood, and even in the county.

Mr. Rimpler, by dint of a keen scent, had discovered Toker, the man who signed the document

which had been in old Mrs. Rimmon's possession. He, however, Mr. Rimpler found, had definite plans of his own, and showed no disposition whatever to aid him. Mr. Toker had been keeping his eye on Joshua Rimmon for many years, with only occasional intermissions during special absences at gold diggings and elsewhere. He had been an accomplice of Joshua Rimmon's in some piece of work that would not bear daylight, before his marriage. When his luck was "up," as he styled it, he was inclined to keep his mouth shut about what would "do for" them both. But he did not now care a brass farthing, he said, what became of him. He had done other things since then, that would shut his mouth for ever, should he once get caught, which event, he prophesied, would come off very shortly. And it hurt his feelings, he said, to see that Joshua a-building of Methodist cathedrals, and he had made up his mind that he wouldn't leave the world himself, in an infamous manner, too, without turning Joshua out of the clover he was in. He explained this in a dogged and don't-care-ish manner to Rimpler. He had nothing to gain, he said, except spite.

“Does anyone else know this secret of yours and Mr. Rimmon’s?”

“There’s only one person in the world, I believe, knew about it, and that was his mother, and she’s dead. She got a letter o’ mine, I always think; anyhow, he never got it, and never dared ask her for it.”

“What if that paper is in my possession?” Mr. Rimpler next observed.

“Look here,” Mr. Toker replied, “I see the game you’re at quite well, and I’m not going to help you to play it. I wouldn’t ’a’ told you this, except that I don’t care a d—— for nothing now.”

And from this point Mr. Rimpler found it impossible to move him. Neither could he get the least idea as to the means Mr. Toker meant to employ.

Mr. Rimpler was just returning one day from giving some directions, and viewing the progress of the palatial residence, when he met Mrs. Rimmon coming post-haste towards him. It was evident from her manner that something terrible had happened.

“Oh, Mr. Rimpler, do come home as quick as you can,” she said. “I don’t know what has happened. He’s awful.”

“Who?” inquired Rimpler.

“Oh, Joshua; come on.”

“What’s the matter with him? He was all right when I came out.”

“So he was; but a strange man came and saw him, and. . . he was very queer when he saw him. Well, I went into the dining-room, and Joshua, he stared at me like a wild thing, and I asks him what’s the matter. And oh, Mr. Rimpler, he can’t move and he can’t speak, but I’m sure he knows everything.”

A dreadful thought crossed Mr. Rimpler’s mind. Had the man suddenly become paralysed without having signed the will he (Rimpler) had drawn up? He hurried to the scene as fast as his legs would carry him, leaving Mrs. Rimmon to follow as she could.

To his astonishment, on the threshold, whom should he meet just arrived from Leamington, but Jubal. “How is he?” asked Rimpler of Jubal.

“Is anything up with him?”

“I believe he’s paralysed.”

The two rushed to the dining-room together. There sat Joshua Rimmon, with eyes fixed in an agonised stare and appeal that showed as plainly as anything that his intelligence was intact. First one addressed him, and then the other, but no sound was elicited from him, nor yet a movement. Silas raised one of Mr. Rimmon’s arms. It fell like a log of wood when he loosed it. If ever eyes tried to talk, Mr. Rimmon’s did.

A thought struck Mr. Rimpler, and he said to Jubal, “Don’t you think you had better go for a doctor?”

“Oh, thank you,” replied Jubal, “you had better go yourself, and leave me with him.”

Mr. Rimpler said rudely, he should do nothing of the sort; but rang the bell, and ordered Sarah to go.

Mrs. Rimmon herself was upon that errand, though she was losing her way in a familiar road, owing to her frightened state of mind.

“I see you know what we are saying,” said Jubal, in a high-pitched voice, to his father. “So

it's all the same to me. You take your turn now of listening while I talk to you, you infernal hypocrite. I have known villains, and villains enough, since I left this cursed roof; but the most diabolical, hypocritical, and sneaking villain I have ever encountered has been my father. For my own existence I do not thank you. It has been a curse and not a blessing to me, considering the nature you endowed me with. I do not believe it is in my power to be good or honourable. When I was a child, I hated you. When I grew older and found you out, I despised you too. And what have I turned out now?" And Jubal laughed a scornful laugh. "I shall die on the gallows yet."

"Look here, young Rimmon," Mr. Rimpler broke in, "don't be so diabolical. What do you want to kick a man who is down for?"

"Oh, I like that," laughed Jubal, in a mad way. "Don't you talk to me about being diabolical, and about kicking people who are down. How many wretched hearths have you and he, and that infernal Hackbit, sold up? Hasn't he made every penny of his cursed money by kicking men who are down?"

I want him to know that I know all about his manner of getting his money, and that I have known it a long time, and all Jumley and all the world shall know it too. I see he understands me. His memory shall be lifted on high, as a warning. He shall become a proverb."

Perhaps eyes can never show their true power of speaking until power of speech and movement are gone, while the intelligence remains. Mr. Rimmon said with his eyes, "Kill me, but say no more," as plainly as his voice could have spoken. "Put me out of my misery," his eyes kept pleading. Both Jubal and Silas Rimpler understood these eyes. Jubal, as if pushed on to tear his father limb from limb morally, by the arch-fiend himself, gloated over his father's agony, and replied to the look of the eyes—

"When did you ever spare me? What reason have I to spare you? You spread your ill-usage of me over years; I have to take my revenge in an hour. What shall make me stay my hand?"

Mr. Rimpler turned his face away, from sheer agitation, and closed his eyes to shut out the sight

of Mr. Rimmon's anguish. "Look you, young Rimmon," he said, "drop it; he's bad enough, he's dead beat."

"Go to the devil," said Jubal, brutally. "You are only better than he is in one way; you are both of you devils, only you didn't pretend to be an angel of light. In the other world you talk about," he went on, addressing his father, "you'll go to your reward safe enough, and if I don't follow you to torment you after death, it shan't be my fault. But at least you shall do this much, you shall make a will, if I hold your hand that holds the pen, villain that you are."

Mr. Rimpler felt, and showed plainly in his face that he was himself utterly checkmated; he had never been so nonplussed in his life.

"Yes, you scoundrel, you shall do that at least," Jubal went on in mad passion; and he turned hurriedly to search for paper and a pen.

"I shall not witness it," said Mr. Rimpler, standing up sturdily, and he marched from the room; and that action of his, the result of disappointed ambition and anger, was the means of

saving his life. By some strange chance the garden door opposite was open, and Mr. Rimpler abstractedly entered it, and marched about the gravel paths in an angry manner, and cast his eyes on one object after another.

Some one else happened to espy the open garden gate too. It was no other than Miss Dorcas. She entered, seeing Mr. Rimpler there.

“What is the matter, Mr. Rimpler?” she said. “People say they have seen Ann running about without any bonnet on.”

But the answer to this question was never given. The earth appeared to rumble immediately under their feet. They started, in their terror, and gazed at each other. A louder report followed, and the earth shook.

“Oh, God,” cried Dorcas, pointing with her forefinger in a tragical manner, “it’s the house;” and as they looked, the forepart of the building shuddered and fell with a mighty crash. A single shriek was heard. Yet another crash followed, and a chimney-stack was flung with immense violence into the garden gateway.

“If I believed in superstition,” said Mr. Rimpler, in great agitation, “I should say it was the visitation of God.”

“What are you muttering at?” demanded Dorcas, frantically. “Is anybody in the house?”

Another crash followed. The masonry which had been supported against the part that had just fallen, gave way, and the garden doorway was now completely blocked.

“Why don’t you go out and see who’s in the house?” cried Dorcas, wringing her hands.

“Will you have the goodness to tell me which way?” retorted Mr. Rimpler, angrily, “with that infernal glass all over the walls?”

“You a man!” sneered Miss Dorcas, “and afraid of a few cuts and scratches, to save human life!”

Mr. Rimpler was stung to the quick by this attack; but he could find no suitable reply. Soon there was a rush of feet, and a mighty sound of voices in the air. The falling of a house in the Black Country is a well-known sound, and soon collects a crowd.

“Who was in the house?” shrieked Dorcas, who had now some difficulty in making herself heard, such was the hubbub in the street outside the garden.

“Your brother and your hopeful nephew,” replied Rimpler.

Miss Dorcas now clambered up on the fallen masonry that filled up the doorway, and peered out through a little aperture that was left.

“What can you see?” asked Mr. Rimpler, excitedly.

“Get up on the wall and find out for yourself,” replied Miss Dorcas, spitefully.

“My brother’s in the house,” she then bawled from the aperture. “Get him out, can’t you, if there’s a man among you.”

As a matter of fact there were not many men, for it was not a time at which the day-hands were out of the coal-mines, and the night-hands were asleep for the most part.

The few men that were there in the crowd of women knew better than to risk their necks in a building that had shown such a tendency to sudden collapse.

A female figure now advanced along the road, accompanied by a doctor; and when she saw what had taken place, she flung her arms into the air and shrieked aloud—"My poor mistress, where is my poor mistress?" That mistress was in the crowd, with eyes fixed and glassy, staring at the ruined house, when another mass of masonry fell.

"Which room was my brother in?" cried Dorcas, turning her head to where Rimpler was standing, frozen with fear, and expecting, as much as he ever expected anything in his life, that the ground would open under him next.

"They were in the dining-room," replied Mr. Rimpler, in a voice that sounded weak and unlike his own.

"Then Lord have mercy on them," said an outsider who caught the words, "for they're buried fathoms deep," which language was very expressive if not accurate.

There appeared to be nothing for the crowd to do but to watch the loosened bricks fall one after another or in masses.

"Why, who'd a thought this was undermined?"

cried a voice in the crowd. "Mr. Rimmon's often said to me, as how his place, and the land by St. Martha's Church, and the other piece he's a-building on, were the only pieces in the neighbourhood he was sure of. He's a fool who ever buys a house in the Black Country, says I, for it's sure to be built like the house the Bible tells us on, on the sand. They may talk about knowing whether a place is undermined or not. But it's what nobody can say; only it's more likely yes than no, when a house is in the middle of a coal mine country, and it only wants a man to be a bit out in his calculation to make a cutting go under your house or not."

But even while the crowd, breathless, watched the ruin of the house, so familiar to them, another rumble and a crash were heard at a little distance. At this sound, Mr. Rimpler gave a yell. The noise did not frighten the populace as his yell did. Panic seemed to seize them; they all rushed frantically from the spot, leaving the imprisoned Dorcas and Rimpler to do what they could.

Miss Dorcas, seeing Sarah moving away last of all, called out suddenly, "Sarah, good, kind Sarah,

don't you think you could move some of this from before the door?"

"No, I don't, miss," said Sarah from the road, determinedly.

"But I'm here too," cried Mr. Rimpler. "Sarah, I'll give you a sovereign when I come out. You're very strong, Sarah. If I were to help, don't you think you could move something?"

"Oh, you're there, are you?" cried Sarah, recognising the voice, but not seeing Mr. Rimpler.

"Yes, Sarah, I am here," replied the broken-spirited Rimpler; "and I never did you any harm," he added abjectly.

"Do you think she'll help you if she won't help me?" said Dorcas, turning round and looking at him.

"You're in no danger there," said Sarah.

"I venture to doubt that," remarked Mr. Rimpler rather sharply.

"She's going away," cried Miss Dorcas to Rimpler, "she's actually going away, and there's nobody there now."

"Sarah," roared the despairing Rimpler. "I'll

give you two sovereigns. Five! Ten! I've got it on me, I swear I have. Sarah," he fairly howled, "I'll marry you, I swear I will, if you'll let me out."

Sarah was too far off to hear this latter proposal. She was following her mistress, who had been taken into a neighbour's house.

Mr. Rimpler began to think seriously of climbing the glass-covered wall if he could by any means. He mounted a rockery, but even then there was a height equal to that of his entire body above him; the rockwork gave way, and he tumbled backwards, which occurrence was greeted by Dorcas with a laugh of derision.

A considerable time passed during which Mr. Rimpler sat down on a stone to await death, and occupied himself in tearing up all his private notes into minute fragments, which act of folly he intensely regretted some time afterwards.

After a while the crowd began to gather outside again; but nobody seemed to think of liberating those who were in the garden.

"What was the other noise?" cried Miss Dorcas to the crowd in general.

She was answered in so deafening a manner that she was unable to gather what was shouted. Mr. Rimpler, however, caught the words. "It's a visitation," he cried, "I declare it's a visitation."

Incredible as it may seem, the other sound had been produced by the falling of what was built of the Methodist cathedral and the palatial residence. It was a coincidence, that was all. To this day, however, the Black Country people look upon this catastrophe as the direct work of the hand of God; and not a man could be found, much less a woman or child, who would venture to make use of any of the rubbish thus spread upon the ground. To this day it remains; a single brick has never been carted away.

But to return to Mr. Rimpler. On hearing the cry of the crowd, so convinced was he that Heaven was punishing the outrageous wickedness of that house, that he felt there could be no escape for him, and he determined to die game.

"We can die but once," he remarked to Dorcas.

"And after death the judgment," she added

consolingly. "But we're in no danger of dying here, you fool."

Mr. Rimpler felt like a man charged with a revelation, as he replied ominously, "We are all doomed."

"Speak for yourself, please," rejoined Dorcas from her elevation. "They've been trying to move the stones, but they're wedged that fast, it would want an 'Ercules to move them. But we shall get out all right if you've got any patience."

It must be recollected that Miss Dorcas had been brought up amongst this sort of thing, whereas to Mr. Rimpler it was a very unpleasant novelty. Certain words he had heard Joshua Rimmon read in the disagreeable prayer-times which had been inflicted upon him came vividly into his mind; and like a prophet who speaks not from choice, but from inward compulsion, Mr. Rimpler cried solemnly, "Whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, I cannot escape." He could not recollect the passage correctly, but he remembered the spirit of it.

Dorcas now became very anxious to get out on

her own account, for she imagined herself shut up in the garden with a madman; and she again appealed to the crowd. But it was a matter of great difficulty for them to dislodge the stones, however much they might be disposed to do so; and it was not till dark in the evening that a way was made for the imprisoned pair through the *débris*.

As for the house of Rimmon itself, that was not interfered with. Black Country people knew better than to meddle with a place that might not have done falling, more especially as there could not by any possibility be any one alive in it to rescue.

When Dorcas had passed through the aperture, a figure was seen to follow her rapidly, and then to disappear; and from that hour Mr. Rimpler was never seen nor heard of at Jumley.





CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST.

SOME weeks later Keziah was made aware of what had occurred. The knowledge of it had been carefully kept from her till she should be stronger. Elworthy then only told her such details as were absolutely necessary.

The bodies of her father and brother lay beside that of Keziah's first husband in Jumley cemetery. Mrs. Rimmon had ever since been at the Berediths'. Mrs. Beredith herself had fetched her as soon as she had heard of the catastrophe, and with her had brought the faithful Sarah, who had refused with many tears to be separated from her mistress.

On Keziah's inquiring about Laura, Elworthy told her a plain fact, and her name was not afterwards mentioned between them. She had not gone home to her father; she had quitted England in company with Winterfold.

What Elworthy did not tell Keziah was that the iron safe in which Mr. Rimmon kept his papers had been extricated from the ruin, and that in it had been discovered sufficient evidence of Joshua's preposterous hypocrisy and wickedness. This had somehow got bruited about, and was in everybody's mouth, and a frightful scene had occurred in the cemetery at the interment; for Black Country people when roused to indignation become savage. They came by hundreds into the cemetery and dragged the coffin from the bearers, dragged it ignominiously along the gravel path, and would have burst it open and torn the corpse limb from limb had it not been for a special body of police ordered to the spot by the forethought of the officiating minister, who had, before the funeral, had sufficient warning that something of this nature might be expected.

A special watch was kept at the grave day and night, during the first fortnight after the interment, till the spirit of indignation and mad passion had had time to cool a little.

A will was discovered in the iron safe, leaving

everything absolutely to Keziah, and nothing to Mrs. Rimmon. Elworthy told his wife this, but added. "And I know my Kizzy won't blame me when I tell her that in her name I have absolutely refused the money. It could never prosper. Your uncle David and I have talked it out together, and we are both resolved not to touch a penny of it."

"Oh, I am so glad of that," said Keziah, earnestly, "it would be sure to bring a curse with it. What will become of it?"

"That can matter very little to us, Kizzy," her husband replied. "And now my precious one," he said caressingly, "all those who love you best have been talking things over, and we all think it will be much better if you, and I, and the bairn, and your mother, go right away, where no one knows anything of these miserable things that have happened."

Keziah looked far away, and remained silent for a few minutes, and then, heaving a sigh, she fell to kissing Leonard, who was on her knee; then looking up at her husband, asked him, "Where shall we go?"

"Should you be afraid of going a long way, Kizzy?"

“How can I be afraid of going anywhere with you?” she asked, almost in an injured tone.

“Well then, Kizzy, there’s a splendid opening for me at Sydney, and I am not without means. And Gerald Harwyn has bought my practice here, which gives me some more money in hand.”

“What does mamma say about it?” Keziah asked.

“She is quite willing to go anywhere,” Elworthy replied: “and I ought to tell you,” he added with a smile, “that two faithful allies of yours insist on accompanying us, so we shall be quite a party. Both Sarah and Wilson refuse to be left behind, and I have promised to take them on condition that you consent to the plan.”

A couple of years later on, a traveller returned home to England—no other in fact than young Edmond Saltring, now such a bronzed, whiskered fellow as to be unrecognisable—was recounting to a group of interested listeners at his father’s table stories of his and Harry’s exploits, and news of friends. “I had no idea I should meet any one I

knew at Sydney," he was saying. "And I got one surprise after another. I was walking along the High Street, when I saw, coming towards me, Keziah Rimmon—I beg her pardon, Mrs. Elworthy—and she doesn't look a day older. She had two beautiful children with her, Leonard, you know, and a little girl, whose name was Lucy Maud, she told me. I had never even heard that they had settled there. She made me promise to go home with her to see the doctor and the others. I had no sooner got into the room, mother," he said, addressing her especially, "than I heard Mr. Rockingham's voice. Yes; he was there, and Madeline, and Bertram. They are actually settled there."

"Really now," said Mr. Saltring, "to think of your having come across them; and nobody here knows where they are, for Mr. Rockingham gave up all his family, to stick to his niece."

"But why have they got Bertram with them?" asked Edmond of his father. "I thought he was living with Keziah, until it was time for them to go home."

"Madeline took a great fancy to him," said Mr.

Saltring a trifle brusquely, "and Keziah gave him up to her, or rather, I should say, we did."

"But I wonder you never wrote to tell us that Dr. Elworthy and all of them had gone to Sydney. Dr. Elworthy has got a splendid practice; and I must not forget to tell you that Mrs. Rimmon looks positively young. And you know the two servants they took out with them; well, Wilson's with them now; and she just worships little Maud. But as for Sarah, she's actually married."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed that Sarah could have left them," said Mrs. Saltring in the tone of a woman who has received a great shock to her confidence in human nature.

"Ah," said Edmond, "I thought I should take you in. She has married the doctor's coachman, if you please, and they both live in the house. And who do you think is on her way out, just for a six months' visit?"

"Oh, we know all about that," said Mrs. Saltring. "And we think it would be all the better if Mrs. Towers settled out there with them, for she has been like one lost ever since Keziah went away."

“Well, why don’t you suggest it to her, and, perhaps, she will?” said Edmond.

“It’s no go, my boy; Layton has tried that game,” said Mr. Saltring. “She can’t leave that grave; and Layton told me that she would not even go on a visit to her friend without an absolute promise from him that if she should die while away, her body should be brought back and laid by her husband.”

“So Dr. Towers and his sisters have taken quite a sociable turn, have they?” as if reverting to a subject that had been mentioned before.

“Yes, I can assure you, they are quite an acquisition. They have even taken to entertaining.”

“And who is the new parson here, now Mr. Rockingham’s gone?”

“Oh, the Rev. Brougham Banner got the living, and has greatly improved.”

“And is Jody Waddy still above ground?”

“Oh yes, but he’s off duty. Mr. Rockingham pensioned him. And last night as I walked through the churchyard, I saw him walking, as he said, round his bit of ‘garding,’ smoking his little pipe; and he

remarked to me with considerable pride, that the new sexton would have to dig a good while afore he'd made as many graves as he had."

"And what has become of Jubal's uncle David," Edmond asked.

"Oh, he was in low water for a little time," said Mr. Saltring. "I expect that Jubal was an expensive article. But he has quite got over that. And they say he spends a part of every day in writing to Keziah."

"And Jubal's aunt Dorcas, does she live at Jumley now?"

"Oh, yes. She stood her ground in spite of everything. She said she wasn't going to flee the country as if she was a villain and a malefactor. They say she has made a nice nest-egg for herself, but she still keeps on the shop. But now, let us change the subject; tell me some more about Harry and yourself. We are so proud of the way you have been getting on. It will be time for you to be going back again to Australia before we've heard half what we want to hear."

"And what will Maud say when she comes?"

said a laughing girl with rebellious black ringlets to a husband who was smiling down on her as if she were the most wonderful thing in creation.

“She will say I have grown dreadfully matronly,” went on Kizzy, with a pout of her ripe lips. “I’m afraid I shall grow stout.” And truly, as her husband looked at her, he did see a plump roundness of outline which was very pleasant to behold and spoke volumes as to her contentment, as did the pretty dimples that had found their way somehow to her face. But Keziah’s eyes, always so beautiful in her stormy days, how lovely had they grown in her new life!

“I used to say,” observed Dr. Elworthy, gently and proudly stroking the black curls, “that your beauty yet lacked something. I know now that it was happiness.”

“And yet,” said Kizzy, growing serious in a moment, and the dark eyes looking brighter for gathering tears, “it would have been so much better, dear husband, to have deserved all the happiness we have! We did so many foolish things and so many wrong ones. What a God it must be to have taken pity on us, and given us heaven!”

"The past is not ours," replied her husband, sadly ; " the present is. There is no remedying past wrong, nor any balancing of accounts before the great Providence. That is the one hope for such as you and me."

" Do you think, Rupert," asked Kizzy, earnestly, " that one can blot out one's past sins by watching over others, and preventing their like fall ? "

" No, my Kizzy," he said, shaking his head sadly. " God only can do that. Yet go on doing your work, Kizzy ; for that is right for to-day."

" I cannot but do what you call 'my work', " cried the girl, her face growing cheerful in a moment, and covered with rippling sunshine. " If my happiness could not come out somehow, I should die of it, I think. And you," she went on, saucily tossing her head, " are trying to kill me of it, just, I believe, to punish me for having kept you so long from me."

" I understand all that now, Kizzy," he said ; " even that was all your noble nature. You would punish yourself. You know now, don't you dear, that punishment and reward are not ours to deal with. But there is Lucy calling."

In a moment, at that call, Kizzy had left her husband's side, and as she passed through the door with a light step her husband gazed after her, and thought—"Worth all the waiting! Worth all the nursing! To have that noble heart at last, for ever and for ever with me."

But if her husband blessed her, so did others. She poured out upon that city the sunshine of her smiles, the healing balm of a great loving heart, set free from its own turmoil to take in that of all the world. And if she were called an angel there, she had been called an angel before, in her sorrowful days. Yet, what would those colliers have thought, had they seen this Kizzy, born among them, bred among them, and of them, shining as she now shone, in happy wifehood, in noble motherhood? It is a mercy they did not see her. They might have learned idolatry. A creature at once so beautiful and so good would have seemed to them divine. They would have prayed to her.



